

The co-responsibility of the Reichswehr in the dissolution of the Weimar Republic and in the consolidation of National Socialist power after 1933 is beyond question. But why did it so self-confidently keep its distance from the political institutions of Weimar, only to allow itself all the more quickly to be corrupted by Hitler? The usual answer to this question long attributed purpose-rational reasons to the military for its actions and behavior: no one had promised the breaking of the restraints of Versailles and the “making militarily capable” of the German people as convincingly as Hitler. Until far into the Second World War, however, there had supposedly still existed a principled distance between the Wehrmacht and the National Socialist regime, resulting from Prussian traditions, from the influence of the Seeckt school through which the leading military men had passed, and from the traditional self-understanding of the German army as its own “state within the state.”

Only recently have historians thoroughly revised this picture. They have pointed out, among other things, that the inner homogeneity of the armed force was already in the Weimar period at most an ideal image. A closer investigation of the groupings within the officer corps, however, has not yet been sufficiently carried out. Above all, there is still lacking the investigation of a military-technical and ideological current in the Reichswehr officer corps which in contemporary military writing was called the “Young Generation.” It connected itself, despite the severe restrictions of the Versailles Treaty, to Clausewitz, thought in terms of people’s war, inclined toward romantic-nationalist ideas, and rejected the cold-rational calculation of the Chief of Army Command, Colonel General Hans von Seeckt. During the Weimar period this school of thought remained marginal, but under Hitler it flourished, since he seemed to make possible the dream of total war and its preparation. That this was from the beginning a mutual misunderstanding follows already from the fact that the military model of the “Young Generation” was not least the Red Army. One of the most important representatives of this school was the later Reich War Minister Werner von Blomberg.

Few of the leading German officers took the path from Weimar to Hitler as consistently as Blomberg. The author follows the career that he made along this path: first department chief in the Truppenamt, then chief of that office and thus responsible for the operational planning of the Reichswehr, then in 1929 sidelined as military district commander in East Prussia because his high-flying ideas about the use of mass armies in the sense of a *levée en masse* diametrically contradicted the course of the political leadership of the Reichswehr. Then came the meeting with Hitler, who promised Blomberg the “military strengthening of the German people” and, immediately after the seizure of power, made him Reich War Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht. Without himself being a follower of the NSDAP, Blomberg, as a supporter of large-scale rearmament, nevertheless allowed Hitler to wrap him around his finger. Blomberg’s “two-pillar theory” had as its goal an authoritarian state resting on the equal foundations of Wehrmacht and Party, and he believed, as would become clear, mistakenly, that Hitler too pursued this goal of a “division of power.”

The author portrays Blomberg’s rise as differentially and convincingly as his decline and fall. In 1936, on Hitler’s birthday, he was raised by Hitler to General Field Marshal. Soon afterward, however, a process of increasing loss of prestige began, culminating in February 1938 in his removal. The author illuminates these events, which, together with the simultaneous dismissal of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, von Fritsch, brought about a complete restructuring of the Wehrmacht leadership and meant the final change of course toward an aggressive war soon to be waged, with a clarity and accuracy not previously achieved.

One may ask whether, given the breadth of the theme “Reichswehr, Wehrmacht and National Socialism,” the biography of one individual, even an outstanding soldier, does not fall short.

Skepticism toward biography as a genre of historical scholarship is widespread in Germany, unlike, for example, in the Anglo-Saxon countries. Against this one must say that the overemphasis of structural factors and constraints misses the central question of the individual responsibility of actors. Just as light consists both of waves and of quanta, so history consists both of processes and of situations, each of which contains within itself an abundance of possible futures, and in which the freedom of decision and the possibilities of decision available to the actors show themselves. This element of freedom and possibility, which alone establishes political-historical responsibility, must be uncovered amid the compulsive structures, in order to make history significant for the present as the history of human beings.

That too is what Kirstin Schäfer's book accomplishes. It is carefully built upon a broad source base, and she has also succeeded in bringing in new sources not previously used. Her book provides remarkable insights and reflections on the military and political situation of the Weimar Republic and the Hitler years up to 1938. It is written in a gripping, critical, and differentiated manner, but also with pointed judgment.

PREFACE

"You shall not make yourself an image!" How often this sentence came into my thoughts while I wrote this book, in order to cover a skeleton of historical facts with life. The more I approached the end of the presentation, the more finished the analysis of General Field Marshal von Blomberg's life path seemed, the more doubts arose in me as to whether I could do justice to the real human being — whether I had not allowed myself to be deceived by this or that fact, understood too little at this point, saw too much at another, sweetened here, reinterpreted there. How gladly I would have asked him so many things.

Several important people, and one dog, had for years to endure these and similar thoughts patiently, knowing that they did not live with me alone, but in a certain sense also with the shadow of Blomberg, who absorbed a large part of me. This book could not have come into being without their understanding and their love.

My special thanks go to my parents, Hans-Heino and Renate Karla Schäfer. They gave me the freedom to choose myself. Without their support and their trust in me, the creation of this work would have been impossible. My mother also read the entire manuscript and helped critically and expertly in editing the text.

I thank my teacher and academic father, Professor Dr. Hagen Schulze, who has always accompanied and supported me on my path so far. The same naturally applies to Professor Dr. Etienne François. I thank him and his wife Beate François for their friendly advice and for many pleasant hours, which were filled not only with discussions about the content of this book.

Without my friends I would not have had the strength to write this book: those who believed in me, helped me, accompanied me, were enthusiastic, who managed to juggle my doubts and my despair, listened to me and made me laugh. Their loyalty was and is everything: Dr. Ilka Mehdorn, Irene von Mering, Dr. Karsten Plöger, Esther Quednau, Donna Strothmann, Dr. Thies Schulze, and Charlotte Siebenrock should be named.

During my research I met wonderful people who gave life to the work simply by allowing me to know

them. I am thinking above all of Dr. Peter von Blomberg and his life companion Sigrig von Busse. Peter von Blomberg made accessible to me the estate of his grandfather as well as other personal notes of the general, answered my countless questions, and was prepared to engage, with interest and great critical sharpness, with the life of his grandfather — and thus with a part of his own history. My thanks also go to Otto Freiherr von Blomberg, who expertly and helpfully opened for me the gates of the family archive of the von Blombergs at the Nienfeld manor estate. My thanks go to Dr. Andrea Bielmeier in Munich, who gave me insight into her grandfather's correspondence with her mother Sybille and sweetened my search for the "true Blomberg" with sensitivity and good cooking. Likewise I thank Dorothee Keitel in Munich, who, as the only living daughter of the War Minister, was an important contemporary witness and conversation partner for me. I give high credit to the remarkable Fritz Tobias, who granted me insight into his extensive contemporary-historical collection in Hanover and willingly made his materials and research results available.

INTRODUCTION

In January 1938 a picture of Werner von Blomberg appeared in the German press — at this time German War Minister and thus the embodiment of the warrior in Hitler's military state. The photograph showed the nearly sixty-year-old General Field Marshal on his honeymoon with his young second wife during a visit to the Leipzig Zoo, in front of the monkey cage. He is dressed in civilian clothes; on his right arm he leads his wife, on his left he carries her handbag. The publication triggered a wave of mockery in barracks and officers' clubs over the "rubber lion," as Blomberg was called behind his back because of his alleged pliability toward Hitler. It got worse: a Berlin policeman recognized in the young marshal's wife in the photo a girl who had once been listed in his files as a prostitute. He reported the discovery, and a file with pornographic photographs of Blomberg's new wife appeared. A morals affair was born, from which the greatest scandal of the Third Reich emerged: the so-called Blomberg-Fritsch crisis, still surrounded by legends today, ended in a fluid mass of rumors about a plot against the minister and with his fall. Within a few days Blomberg was dismissed and, for the time being, "shipped off" abroad by Hitler. He did not shoot himself, as his naval adjutant had angrily demanded and as the code of honor of the Wehrmacht would have suggested. Rather, he disappeared completely from public life. He had fallen from the heights of power into the depths of damnation, since through his *mésalliance*, at a neuralgic point in the history of the Third Reich, he had violated the honor code of military society and had made himself guilty within its moral system. The cult around the War Minister ebbed away; the army erased his name from the rank lists; the newspapers from then on no longer reported about him; his busts and portraits were removed and handed over to forgetting — the memory of the ostracized man erased. A modern *damnatio memoriae* had been imposed upon him.

The abrupt end of the War Minister's career marked the end of all dreams of the Prussian-German military elite that it could decisively co-determine the policy and course of the Third Reich. The office of Reich War Minister was abolished. On 4 February 1938 Hitler personally assumed supreme command over the Wehrmacht, which he had thereby finally disempowered. Blomberg himself was not allowed to return to service even in the Second World War, and this broke him. As an officer of Wilhelmine stamp, he belonged to that central type in German cultural history for which Bernd Ulrich coined the term "man of will." The Horatian dictum *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, that consequential triad of discipline, readiness for violence, and readiness for death, had been deeply internalized by him and elevated to the guiding image of his existence. Embittered by his personal fate, he was forced to watch the development of world history passively, isolated, and as if through a glass wall, from the seclusion of his exile in the Bavarian mountains. The general, as he himself writes, was

“coffined and buried.” There, in “exile,” he wrote his memoirs, which remain unpublished to this day.

From 1933 to 1938 Blomberg counted among Hitler’s closest confidants outside the Party and among the most influential admirers and allies of the dictator within the military establishment. In addition, as will be shown, he had an important symbolic function in the creation of Hitler’s myth, which was inseparably interwoven with the National Socialist military cult.

Against this background, and at a time of continuing popularity of the history of the Third Reich, it is striking that Blomberg’s role as Defense and War Minister is only rarely presented in any truly illuminating way in the flood of literature, films, and television broadcasts on the subject, even though he can be seen directly at Hitler’s side in so many pictures. When Bavarian Radio broadcast a twelve-part television program on “Hitler’s Generals” in 1984, numerous relatives of generals and witnesses were interviewed. No one went to the Blomberg family.

The historical substance of the General Field Marshal had melted down into the story of the “marshal and the whore,” which became a fixed component of the stock of historical images from which one could draw again whenever needed. The writer Hans Hellmut Kirst knew the value of the successful recipe of the explosive mixture of intrigue, sex, and scandal, and processed the Blomberg material into a novel, *General Affairs*, which soon reached a world circulation of five million copies. Even today the memory of the “marshal and the whore” occasionally begins to ferment again, as *Bild am Sonntag* recently showed when, under the title “Porn scandal — that is why Hitler’s War Minister fell,” it was able for the first time to serve up the 1932 photographs of Margarethe von Blomberg, which were fatal for the minister and consequential for German military history.

But around what one might perhaps want to call the “true Blomberg,” there remained silence. The scholarly evaluation of the General Field Marshal remained attached to the verdict of that *damnatio memoriae* that had been imposed on him in 1938. At times, in the literature, with regard to the events of 1938, people even spoke only of a Fritsch crisis. Thus no scientifically grounded biography of him has so far emerged, and essential questions about his historical role and personality have remained open.

Historical individuals, however, are subject to the laws of remembering and forgetting, those sisters that at all times have had an important function for the transmission and legitimation of historical images. A biography of Hitler’s War Minister must always also ask about his legend and search for the reasons for remembrance within forgetting. That historical remembering and forgetting in the history of the Wehrmacht is a political issue, because the corresponding historical images can still be effective in the present, the author also experienced during her research for this book.

The Bundeswehr, for example, almost completely forgot Blomberg when, in the 1950s and 1960s, it sought to redefine itself. While his military-political “Sovietophilia,” which very much stood within Germany’s military tradition, was one reason for the general’s negative image in the Federal Republic during the Cold War, the reception of Blomberg by GDR historiography turned out to be surprisingly differentiated precisely because of it.

In searching for answers to the question of why the finding of a desideratum had so far had to be stated, one must also point to the long-standing general problems of position affecting German military history after 1945. Until far into the 1980s, unlike for example in Great Britain, there was only little interest among many German historians in war and military history. The reasons for this attitude, incidentally, have still not yet been sufficiently investigated; one is without question to be sought in the collective trauma caused by the end of the Second World War and the associated rupture in German history. In

addition, after 1945 the concept of “militarism” became a slogan of the “Cold War” and for several decades was displaced as an interpretive model for continuities in the history of German society. A similar aversion to that directed against military history existed among many German historians toward the genre of biography, which was misrecognized as the last bastion of historicism. Biography, as Hagen Schulze aptly diagnosed in his inaugural lecture at Kiel in 1977, found itself until far into the 1980s in the “crisis of historical scholarship.” In recent years the genre has experienced a pleasing renaissance and, influenced by the methodological possibilities of the “new biography,” today enjoys increasing popularity again. Important impulses for historiographical research came from the group-biographical approaches of, among others, Ulrich Herbert, Michael Wildt, and Stephan Malinowski.

To write a biography of Werner von Blomberg means not understanding him as an individual, self-contained historical self, as it were a historical microcosm. Rather, he is to be situated in interaction with the society of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to be interpreted, to speak with Wilhelm Dilthey, as a “point of intersection for structures into which his existence is woven.”

This attempt at an interpretation between collective biography and the life-description of a historical person, the question of type and individual, does not include the aim of writing a history of the military in the society of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, or of presenting a renewed analysis of the Wehrmacht in the Third Reich — others have already done that. Thus military-political processes in which Blomberg was involved in his function as Defense and War Minister, his role in the development of the command structure of the Wehrmacht, and in the war economy and planning have been illuminated in individual studies and partly documented in source editions. Blomberg’s activity in Weimar military policy, by contrast, has so far only been presented coherently in initial outlines, so that one focus of the analysis lies on this period.

If one looks at the source situation for the project, the picture is predominantly favorable. Painful gaps appeared in the files of the Reichswehr Ministry, which were consulted for an evaluation of Blomberg’s military policy both in the Weimar Republic and in the Third Reich. Large parts of the written material, both of the Truppenamt and of the Army General Staff, burned on 14 April 1945 during an Allied air attack at their storage location, the magazine building of the Army Archive in Potsdam. The majority of the written material of the Reichswehr Ministry is also only incompletely transmitted, since it was destroyed shortly before the capitulation on the order of the Chief of the High Command of the Wehrmacht.

Included in the analysis were speeches, decrees, memoranda, photographs, and films. Alongside estates, memoirs, and other notes by Blomberg’s co-workers, comrades, and other contemporary witnesses, articles from the military journalism of the 1920s and 1930s as well as from the German exile press of the 1930s were examined. In newspapers such as the *Pariser Tageblatt*, from 1936 the *Pariser Tageszeitung*, in which, among others, the controversial left-liberal Berlin journalist Georg Bernhard wrote, there is reflected the attempt at free expression by exiled German journalists, necessarily standing in sharp contrast to the German domestic press. Together with the foreign press, which they largely follow in their presentation, these newspaper articles form, as it were, a seismograph of the wishes, hopes, and fears of many Europeans connected with National Socialism in general, and with the general officer corps and Blomberg in particular.

For this biography, all of the general’s personal notes were systematically evaluated for the first time. These documents help one to approach the “true” Blomberg, because inseparably interwoven with his actual life path is the phenomenon of his biographical self-construction. Put differently: a biography cannot be written without an analysis of the self-image of the person being biographed, without the

search for the accidents and key experiences that he himself perceived and described as particularly formative for his life. Only in this way is it possible not to succumb to what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu called the “biographical illusion”: that is, looking at a person’s life as a predetermined fate in which accidents play no role.

Alongside Blomberg’s unpublished and unprinted memoirs and diaries, drafts for memoranda, reports, notes, interviews with relatives, as well as personal correspondence and other papers from his estate supplement the “private” source corpus. Blomberg’s notes identify him as a military specialist with the unconditional will to military power. They show his historical fatalism, which finds expression in the constant repetition of Schopenhauer’s dictum: “What happens, happens necessarily.” It is difficult to penetrate into the cosmos of his private life. On the one hand he absolutized the credo of soldierly obedience; on the other hand he was a barren, sparse man, difficult for even his closest relatives and acquaintances to access, who sought to close off his feelings and had deeply internalized the maxim “General Staff officers have no name.” By his own admission, it was the company of books that he all too often preferred to that of human beings.

A major problem in connection with Blomberg’s personal notes is the absence of that part of the general’s memoirs in which he deals with the period from 1933 to 1938. What had happened to these notes? The hypothesis is that Blomberg or members of his family destroyed the memoirs, in view of the impending trials of war criminals, as evidence of Blomberg’s shared guilt in the preparation of the Second World War during the days of Germany’s collapse in spring 1945, in order to withdraw them from Allied access. Against the background of this assertion, the question arises whether the family members knew at all that Blomberg was writing an autobiography, and whether they knew where he kept his notes. It may be assumed that at least his wife Margarethe knew, because of their close living together, especially since he had written on his memoirs until 28/29 January 1945 and at the end refers to a “continuation in the daily notes from 28 January 1945.” Whether, however, the daughters Dorothee and Ursula, who during the turbulent period of the last war years were living temporarily and by necessity in Blomberg’s household at Tegernsee, consciously perceived their father’s autobiographical activity, can at least in one case be excluded. His daughter Dorothee, living in Munich, in any case cannot remember that her father was making notes at that time. Nor does it emerge from the letters to his children that memoirs were being produced or existed. That Werner von Blomberg spoke with his daughters about his memoirs is also rather unlikely given his closed character — especially in these years of isolation. Possibly he would have revealed himself to his sons if they had still been alive. During the few brief meetings during the war before their deaths, in 1941 and 1942 respectively, his notes may indeed have been mentioned, but then certainly only in quite general form. If one proceeds from the assumption that the daughters were informed after all, then they would hardly have removed the notes without the father’s express instruction. The same applies to his wife, who would also have had to be informed in great detail in order to be able to filter out precisely the separated part, 1933 to 1938, with the required haste.

There remains the entirely plausible hypothesis that Werner von Blomberg himself removed this part of his memoirs during the panic of the last days of the war, or later, in view of the arrests and threatening trials against the surviving National Socialist greats, so that the Americans, when they confiscated the house or during an earlier search, could seize the notes only incompletely. If one reads attentively the existing memoirs and diary notes produced in the years 1943 to 1945, however, this seems not very credible, for in them Blomberg is alarming through a lack of sense of reality when it comes to the person of Hitler, to whom he repeatedly professes himself until his death. Despite disappointment over his fall and Hitler’s role in it, he held fast to the end to his belief in him as a spiritual leader. Apparently this belief was the only thing that enabled him not to have to call the meaning of his own existence

completely into question in the collapse of the year 1945, and to remain upright. Why, then, would he have destroyed only one part of his notes and not all of them, since the rest also reflect on the period from 1933 to 1938 and thus also incriminate him? He himself at least admits that it cannot be denied that he had prepared the Wehrmacht for war.

Blomberg writes that he had collected his notes on the period from 1933 to 1938 in separate “black notebooks.” The question arises why he worked through this important section of his life separately from the other notes. One possibility, following the common thesis, would be that he did it in order to be able to destroy his memoirs more quickly should the war be lost. This end of the war, however, he as an experienced military man had already foreseen for some time despite his distance from events. In that respect this thesis too appears little plausible. The bundle of memoirs from 1933 to 1938 could also have been set aside by an unknown hand or gone missing after the Americans had taken it. After all, the notes passed through many offices on the way between the local actors and the Library of Congress in Washington. After Blomberg’s detention, Mrs. von Blomberg, Gruhn, sold the remaining property of her husband, such as his marshal’s baton, at an early date; the diaries went to the Allies in 1947, who brought these documents to the Washington Military Archive for evaluation. After filming, the American government returned the six volumes of the manuscript of the Blomberg memoirs in 1958 to the German Foreign Office in Bonn, which forwarded the documents to the rightful heir, Werner von Blomberg’s grandson Peter. He noticed the absence of that volume which dealt with his grandfather’s memories from 1933 to 1938. As he was informed after an inquiry from Bonn, this volume had, “with the greatest regret, through an oversight,” remained there. It had been “separated from the other estate papers” in order to make determinations about the whereabouts of missing parts of the manuscript for 1933 to 1938. Accordingly, at this point people were not yet assuming either the complete absence of the 1933 to 1938 volume or the destruction of the notes from 1933 to 1938. In the course of her research for this biography, the author received the indication that the missing part of the volume of the Blomberg memoirs was still in Washington and could be viewed there in the form of film reels. The vibrating feeling of high tension that this news triggered gave way to disappointment when correspondence with Washington soon destroyed the hope for the desired notes, since they did not exist there.

Blomberg’s memoirs, according to the author’s hypothesis, were never destroyed; Blomberg quite simply never finished his writings. It seems as if he wrote the memoirs synchronously with his daily notes in order to achieve a better overview, or because it was understandably especially difficult for him to put this fateful part of his life into words; he was inhibited. Fragmentary notes that the general wrote shortly before the end of the war, and in which he does indeed deal with the time of his ministry, offer a possible proof for this. They differ from the rest of the memoirs in that they are not written out, but rather resemble a draft, an outline — an outline of what he had planned to write about the period from 1933 to 1938. The end of the war, his imprisonment, illness, and death in Nuremberg on 14 March 1946 explain why he could no longer complete his work.

I. THE WANDERER (1878–1919)

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Werner Eduard Fritz von Blomberg was born on 2 September 1878 as the first of four children of Lieutenant Colonel Emil von Blomberg and his wife Emma in Stargard/Pomerania, today Stargard Szczeciński. The city on the Ihna had at that time about 21,816 inhabitants; it was and is an important

junction of the railway lines from Stettin to Danzig and Posen.

At the hour of the later marshal's birth, the name von Blomberg was already surrounded by the aura of the military. Little Werner grew up with the collective memories of a family that firmly believed in its soldierly destiny and absolutized soldierly values in upbringing. The most famous ancestor of the later War Minister may probably be considered Alexander von Blomberg, a distant relative from the baronial line of the family. In several respects he was predisposed to become a military figure of memory: in 1800 he had entered the Prussian army, had taken part in the Battle of Jena against the Napoleonic troops in 1806, and in 1809 fought in Ferdinand von Schill's rebel expedition. In 1812 he joined the Russian troops. On 20 February 1813 he wanted to advance with his Cossack unit to the Schlossplatz in Berlin, but was fired on by French troops at the Königstor. Alexander was hit and died — allegedly as the first German victim who fell in the war of liberation before the gates of the city.

Alexander von Blomberg united — like the poet Theodor Körner — in ideal fashion the triad of youth, poetic calling, and sacrificial death for the nation in war. In the Empire both poets were intensively received and, irrespective of the real quality of their verses, were celebrated as youthful martyrs and fighters with lyre and sword. Already in 1812 the journal *Der Freimütige* had published one of Blomberg's poems, and the *Poetische Schriften* written by him were issued posthumously in 1820. The freedom-poet was buried beneath a poplar in the Georgen Cemetery in Berlin. The monument dedicated to him still stands today in northern Berlin, on Otto-Braun-/Friedenstraße. The obelisk of shell limestone was erected in 1913, on the hundredth anniversary of the Battle of the Nations at Leipzig, by the Association of the Lippers in memory of the poet, and was ceremonially unveiled on the hundredth anniversary of his death, 20 February. Alexander von Blomberg's best-known poem, the "Schwertfegerlied," belonged in every collection of war songs until after the First World War, and Werner von Blomberg, like many boys of his generation, grew up with his ancestor's appeal to armament:

Now then say, for whom do you forge the weapons?

You men, I will proclaim it to you:

The weapons I prepare for the people,
Boldly to free themselves from bondage,
That it may fall, the power of the foreign tyrant.
The weapons I prepare for Hermann's battle,
That the bronze scepter of the mad tyrant may pass away,
That freedom may arise on German soil.

Forged with joyful courage
For the German, the holy cause,
Forged so that with the enemy's blood
They drip for holy vengeance.

While the family tree of the baronial line of the Blombergs reaches back into the thirteenth century, the family branch from which the later War Minister descended is comparatively young. In the Seven Years' War a lieutenant named Karl August von Blomberg had sought service in the army of Frederick the Great. He stated that he had served in the small army of the Duke of Courland, claimed noble descent for himself, which could neither be proven nor disproven, hinted that there existed a relationship with the Freiherren von Blomberg in the Lippe principalities, and proved himself as a

brave officer. For this reason the Royal Herald's Office in Berlin had no objections to his bearing the noble name. Almost simultaneously with Karl August, five of his brothers served under the banners of the Prussian king. The Blombergs were scarcely to acquire earthly goods. What remained to them was the honor of being allowed to wear the king's coat and sword.

Anton Julius August von Blomberg, Werner's great-great-grandfather, was born on 4 August 1769 in Potsdam. Educated in the Page Corps, he served from 1787 to 1812 in the Infantry Regiment von Rüts, No. 8, and from 1808 in the 1st Pomeranian Infantry Regiment. From his marriage with Eleonore von Petersdorf came three children. The younger of the two sons, Emil Leopold, 1812–1839, died in a riding accident; the elder, Ludwig Ernst Adolf, 1803–1892, entered the army and eventually became a major. He was Werner von Blomberg's great-grandfather. Ludwig Adolf's marriage with the captain's daughter Amalie von der Borne, mother of his eight sons, ended early, since she died in 1851 at only forty-four. One of the sons — Emil Leopold, born on 22 November 1840 in Stargard — was Werner's father, only eleven years old at his mother's death. It does not require much imagination to picture the climate of the soldierly "men's world" in which Emil Leopold grew up motherless — a world ruled by belief in the Frederician corps d'esprit. Like three of his brothers, Emil Leopold then also went into the military, eventually became a lieutenant colonel and garrison-administration director in Stargard. In 1873 he had married Emma, daughter of the wealthy manor owner Ludwig von Tschepe auf Broniewice and his wife Auguste von Oertzen, who boasted of an exquisite host of ancestors whose origins on the father's side could be traced back into the Prussian province of Posen. The sons — Werner and his two younger brothers Hans, 1886–1914, and Hugo, 1888–1918 — were raised strictly according to the soldierly code and in the self-understanding of the Wilhelmine officer. It cannot be stated precisely how long Werner's father was an officer.

From remarks in his son's memoirs, however, it can be gathered that childhood was shaped by the unrest of constant changes of residence and the accompanying lack of attachment that the life of a soldier's family brought with it. By the age of sixteen Werner had already attended schools in Hanover, Cleve, and Bensberg. There was thus no possibility of building friendships with other children. Instead he developed early on a very close relationship with his siblings. Hans and Hugo, for whom Werner served as a model — all the more because both were considered far less gifted and disciplined than he — fell in the First World War. His sister Margarete, 1875–1940, "Aunt Grete," as Werner's children would later call her, became a canoness and devoted her life entirely to the care of the mother, who died in 1938 at the age of ninety, a few days after Werner von Blomberg's second wedding. Margarete survived her by only two years.

Insight into Blomberg's childhood is made difficult by the fact that there are only a few descriptions in his memoirs and diaries. Unlike Seeckt, who wrote proudly of his father, in a way representative for many of his estate — "My father, who climbed the military ladder, was for me the ideal image of the chivalrous soldier of the old school" — Blomberg says hardly anything about his father and his relationship to him. From his notes one can merely conclude that the father's influence was strict and dominant, and that father and son had a rather distant relationship because of the father's rare presence. In the absence of a present father-figure and the lack of warmth and steadiness of a lasting home, one may see the origin of his search for a leader-figure. Although Blomberg never writes about his father in detail, there are between the lines a few remarks that allow the conclusion that there was a conflict between father and son, which — as Blomberg himself presented it — may have resulted from "youthful exuberance." Such a conflict, not unusual in father-son relationships, could not be cleared away by the father's death in 1904, when Werner was twenty-six. This failure seems to have left in Blomberg a certain feeling of guilt toward the dead father, in which one may recognize first signs of his later strongly developed tendency toward "submission."

Against the background of the mortgage borne by his generation — the Prussian spirit of subordination, as Heinrich Mann described it indelibly for all time — Blomberg's family shaping led to a pronounced authoritarian way of thinking, which was to become an essential constant of his life. Proofs of how much Blomberg seemed to regard authority as a basic condition of his life can be found everywhere in his notes, both directly and indirectly. He developed an extraordinarily high willingness to follow an authoritarian figure with enthusiasm and to receive his orders, which would manifest itself most fatally in his loyalty to Hitler.

Werner von Blomberg subordinated himself completely to the soldierly tradition of his family when, at the age of sixteen, he left the Gymnasium in order to enter the cadet institute in Berlin-Lichterfelde. At this time, according to an anecdote, the name Blomberg was already well known among the cadets. Father Emil, as a cadet, had the habit of carefully brushing his temple hair upward at the rim of his helmet, and had thereby created a new hair fashion in the corps. The brushed-up temple hair was named after him "Blombergers," and by "blomberging" the cadets meant everything that served the beautification or taming of the head hair.

But the name Blomberg soon imprinted itself in another respect too on the memory of the cadet corps, for the new cadet was not only good-looking, athletically gifted, and of friendly, calm nature — thus pleasant in dealings — but soon promised to make a brilliant career in the General Staff. In fact, with his many-sided intellectual interests, his openness to everything new, and his hunger for education, he surpassed many of his comrades, which already at this time prepared his later "outsider image" among the general officer corps. His lifelong intensive occupation with domestic and foreign literature was extremely unusual for a German officer of his generation and gave him something "unmilitary," which was also reflected in his soft facial features. Nevertheless, purely outwardly he embodied for many the ideal type of the Prussian officer. He was "a striking and impressive appearance," "soldierly and good-looking," tall, "blond and Wagnerian," a "real Siegfried — if one can imagine Siegfried with a monocle," as the British historian John Wheeler-Bennett put it in his tendency toward romanticizing exaggerations.

In Lichterfelde, on the edge of Berlin, Blomberg's forty-four-year career in active military service began, as it did for many officers of his generation. Cadet training took place isolated from the social reality of those days and was only rarely interrupted by excursions into "glamorous" Berlin, which stood in such sharp contrast to the strictly regulated and disciplined life in Lichterfelde. After completing the second year of training, Blomberg was detached to a troop unit and on 13 March 1897 was promoted to second lieutenant. In the same year he entered Fusilier Regiment 73 in Hanover, Prince Albrecht of Hanover. During the "Hanover years" he held various command and staff posts.

Into this period falls an important change in the thinking of the later War Minister, which he describes as follows: "When I had been an officer for about two years, thus about twenty years old, I experienced an 'awakening.' It did not lead me to the church-religious, but awakened my head and heart for the things of the spirit and the soul. I believed that something quite special was happening to me; I saw myself moved into a gifted minority. What was certain was that now, behind the contacts which my profession and estate brought me, there existed a separate inner possession into which I could withdraw as into a citadel. I could now be alone with myself and was always eager for intellectual experiences."

The shaping experienced through training and assignment in the Empire had consequences. As a member of the officer corps, Blomberg felt himself politically and socially a privileged representative of the nation. This position rested primarily on the close personal bond to the monarch and supreme

warlord, and it found expression in the primacy of the military over the civilian in state and society.

The year 1904 was significant in two respects for Blomberg's biography: on the one hand his father died of a heart ailment, and on the other he married on 20 April 1904. His first wife, Charlotte Hellmich, 4 October 1880 to 11 May 1932, who likewise came from an officer family, lived in the neighboring house of Blomberg's parents in Hanover — he had, so to speak, met her over the garden fence. In the calm and balanced Charlotte the later General Field Marshal was to find a faithful companion and the mother of his children, and the marriage became very happy. Charlotte's mother was wealthy, so that Blomberg's lifestyle before the war was considerably higher than that of many of his peers of the same estate. Later too, in times of economic poverty such as the Blombergs were to experience after the war, the mother-in-law helped. Still in 1904 Blomberg had to turn his back again on the new family life in Hanover in order to devote himself in Berlin to the duties awaiting him there as adjutant in the second battalion of his regiment Prince Albrecht of Hanover, Fusilier Regiment 73. The family was heavily burdened by the periods of separation. Blomberg endured the lack of familial security with soldierly discipline, since he hoped for a calling into the core of the military elite — the Great General Staff. In the same year he was promoted to first lieutenant and received assignment to the War Academy in Berlin, the successful completion of which was necessary in order to be accepted into the Great General Staff.

For dispatch to the myth-enveloped Prussian War Academy, which owed its origin to the work of Scharnhorst, a selection examination had to be passed. Blomberg mastered it brilliantly, and when in autumn 1904 he entered the Red House in Dorotheenstraße, he soon belonged to those officers who came into question for later use in the General Staff. The period at the Academy down to 1907 was determined by a conventional curriculum in which offensive military doctrine on the tactical and strategic level was emphasized, corresponding to the gospel of Colonel General Alfred Graf von Schlieffen, who from 1891 to 1905 was Chief of the General Staff of the Prussian Army. In this function, at the end of his service period, December 1905/January 1906, he had developed the Schlieffen Plan, that legendary memorandum, still controversial in research today, with the title War Against France, in which he set out the plan of a major offensive in the West aimed at the encirclement and destruction of the French armies. The basic thought of the plan was a rapid attack by the German army against France, in which the opposing army was to be enveloped from the northwest by an advance through the Netherlands and neutral Belgium, while the German army would restrict itself to the defensive at the Alsace-Lorraine fortress belt. After the destruction of the French army, the Germans were then to go over to the offensive in the East. By 1914 the Schlieffen Plan, modified by his successor in office Helmuth Graf von Moltke, had hardened into a consequential dogma, of which there will still be more to say.

Werner von Blomberg's assignment to the War Academy, which under Schlieffen's influence had gained high prestige because extremely high demands were placed on the training of officers, lasted three years and was interrupted only briefly by practical service with various arms. Thus Blomberg, as an infantryman, trained in summer 1905 with Field Artillery Regiment No. 19 in Erfurt and in summer 1906 with the Württemberg Uhlan Regiment No. 19 in Ulm. In summer 1907 he took part in the final journey of the War Academy and received in this connection the qualification for General Staff service, with promotion to first lieutenant on 18 May 1907. The study period at the War Academy was followed from 1 October 1907 by a short period with his Hanover regiment, and on 1 April 1908 he was assigned to the Great General Staff.

Apart from interludes in front-line service, he was to remain in the General Staff until in 1929 he was transferred to East Prussia as military district commander and divisional commander. Activity in the

Great General Staff comprised frequent staff journeys, inspections, and the annual imperial maneuvers. Although many officers belonged to General Staff service, appointment to the Great General Staff was reserved for a selected group. This elite directed the development and preparation of strategic plans, and its presence among the fighting troops throughout Germany was intended to ensure effective execution of staff orders in war. Blomberg's training offered him an excellent possibility of one day achieving this outstanding position. The admission procedure into the Great General Staff was demanding. Each year graduated officers from the War Academy were called to two years of service; thus Blomberg too received his chance in the topographical department of the staff. After successful completion of the two-year service period, the officers had to take part in the annual "staff ride," which took place under direct observation by the Chief of the Staff. This exercise lasted one to two weeks and confronted the participants with a particular tactical problem. After the end of the "ride," three or four officers were admitted to the Great General Staff and were allowed to wear the coveted "red trousers." Blomberg writes in his memoirs: "In March 1910 two comrades and I were, as exceptions, assigned for a third year of service. We were then thirteen years officers and thus the youngest in the competition (...). At the end of the third assignment year I could finally put on the longed-for General Staff uniform. The acquisition had cost me much work, effort, and sweat!" Of the first three obligatory captain's years — captain from 20 March 1911, as the author notes — in the Great General Staff, Blomberg spent the year 1911 as "director" of the topographical department, in order then from 1912 to experience two years in the troop General Staff as General Staff officer of the Metz governorate with the 1st Lorraine Infantry Regiment No. 130, as Blomberg formulated it, in "front service."

His wife and the children Henning, born 3 February 1905, Ursula, born 4 January 1907, Axel, born 22 December 1908, and Sybille, born 5 September 1910, he had housed in a suburb of the garrison city. The money of Charlotte's mother enabled the family to afford a richly furnished villa with stables and servants, and Blomberg depicts the time in Metz, from the ex post perspective, in glowing colors.

In Metz — at that time the largest and most modern German fortress — he learned the art of fortress construction. For the first time in his career he received a troop command. Through his interest in other countries, excellent English and French, and his diplomatic skill, the young officer proved predestined for staff and inspection journeys to other countries, which led him first to Belgium and France, later to Hungary, England, Russia, and the United States. Joseph Goebbels, because of his passion for travel, would many years later call him in his diary the "little travel uncle." In 1914, as company commander of the Metz Infantry Regiment 130, he finally occupied himself with the development of defensive systems which, according to Schlieffen's plan, served the reduction of forces and were to be used on the offensive right wing of the western army.

On 28 June 1914, in Sarajevo, the Austro-Hungarian heir to the throne Franz Ferdinand and his wife were murdered by a Bosnian-Serbian terrorist. The subsequent "July Crisis" led straight into the First World War. On 28 July Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia; on 31 July it proclaimed general mobilization. The allied German Empire on that day announced the "state of imminent danger of war" and on 1 August initiated general mobilization. At the same time it declared war on Russia, and two days later on France. In the Metz garrison too, at this time, late July/early August, as everywhere in the German Empire, preparations were being made for the coming war. In violation of existing regulations, Blomberg hired French peasants as additional laborers for digging trenches and for felling timber to create a clear field of fire in his regimental sector. The open spaces and bare tree stumps must in ghostly fashion have suggested the scale of destruction of the coming years.

Metz was in the midst of war preparations when, at the end of July, Blomberg arranged the move of his family to Charlotte's mother in Hanover and had the family's personal belongings transferred there.

Still in July he followed his family, in order at the beginning of the war to take up the function of a General Staff officer of the 19th Reserve Division, which had been formed from reserve and Landwehr men of Lower Saxony. The later first marshal of Hitler experienced the outbreak of war as a “turning point of the age,” but without the much-invoked euphoria of the August experience; rather he looked into the future with a “feeling of emptiness, paired with tense expectation.”

FIRST WORLD WAR AND POSTWAR PERIOD

The First World War, as the first industrialized war on European soil, made clear the changed nature of war and introduced a paradigm shift in almost all areas of human life. Nothing remained as it had been. As the first “modern” and highly technical war, it shaped the generational experience of the German officer corps as much as that of European society as a whole. Werner von Blomberg too was an intellectual prisoner of the First World War, which traumatized him and by whose outbreak, course, and outcome his personality and his life were decisively shaped. In many areas, the war set the switches for later action and thinking, and the collective and individual experiences gathered in the war were of decisive importance for Blomberg’s future strategic, operational, and tactical reflections, as well as for his image of war. As he reports, the experiences of war had triggered in him a contempt and an “ever-present spirit of contradiction against the usual conventions.” Especially in the military sphere, he no longer wanted to accept what was treated as given and established, but “constantly searched for new paths under the current of a waiting, searching inner tension.”

Blomberg’s career down to the end of the First World War was characterized by the fact that, apart from a few troop commands, he served predominantly in staffs and knew the trench only from a distance. Staff service and the nature of staff work kept him away from the troops and from the front, so that he perceived the First World War predominantly as a “paper war.” That he nevertheless, or precisely for that reason, developed after the war an inclination toward the romantic-nationalist ideas of the Freikorps movement is surprising, since this contradicts the generalization that the Freikorps were a matter for young front officers, while Seeckt’s Reichswehr was instead a matter for somewhat older staff officers. Evidently Blomberg’s inclination toward political soldierdom and youth-movement romanticism was already dominant here.

Characteristic of Blomberg’s development is that during the entire war he never left the western theater of war. This western orientation in the First World War gave his view of the reality of war and his war experiences a certain one-dimensionality. Thus he was shaped by the battles at Verdun, on the Marne, at the Chemin des Dames, by the fighting in the unreal winter landscape of Champagne. These experiences were never to release him. There he had come to know the reality of positional warfare and battles of material, and had lived through severe defeats of the German army.

His personal war experiences on the right wing of the 2nd Army are documented in field-post letters that he wrote almost daily to his wife during this time. When he composed his memoirs during the Second World War, they formed the basis for his recollections of the First World War.

When the war in the West began on 1 August 1914 and, according to the Schlieffen Plan, the German troops first succeeded in the rapid march through Belgium, the coup-like capture of Liège, and the advance to the Marne, Blomberg was General Staff officer Ia in the General Staff of the 19th Reserve Division of the 2nd Army.

During the first days of mobilization he was in the house of his mother-in-law in Hanover, where his family was to wait for him during the entire war. On the eighth day of mobilization the divisional staff had been transported to the division's assembly area southwest of Euskirchen, in order then, on 13 August, as part of the 2nd Army, to begin the advance into Belgium via Elsenborn. Via Spa, Liège, passing northwest of Namur, the division, deployed in the front line, marched farther in a southwesterly direction to Charleroi on the Sambre, which the Spaniards had developed into a fortress in the fifteenth century. On 22 August, in street fighting there, Blomberg's division had its first encounter with French opponents who had established themselves in trenches on the south bank of the Sambre.

The fighting in Charleroi ended with a French withdrawal and the death of Blomberg's brother Hans, who, as a wartime volunteer of Reserve Regiment 73, belonged to the same division as Werner. Hans had been severely wounded during the fighting and, after a few days, succumbed to his injuries in an emergency hospital that had been set up in an empty factory.

Psychologically interesting is Blomberg's treatment of his younger brother Hans in his memoirs. It also gives information about his personal identity as well as about the collective identity of his estate, the "men of will." Obviously the elder brother had a very close relationship with his brother. All the greater, therefore, must have been his disappointment over the less than glorious circumstances of Hans's discharge from the army in 1914: Hans, as a lieutenant, had likewise served in the Metz garrison. There he had fallen into such a quarrel with another officer over a trifle that both officers decided on a duel. Although the duel in the army and navy of the German Empire was officially accepted, it nevertheless had to be permitted in the individual case by a court of honor. Because of the undisciplined conduct of both men, the court of honor in Hans's case had decided against a duel and for the discharge of both officers from military service. Werner von Blomberg experienced this decision as a personal and family disgrace. It may therefore be presumed that Hans, who after the abrupt end of his officer career had first wanted to become a doctor, did not report at the outbreak of the First World War entirely voluntarily, but also at the urging of his brother, as a wartime volunteer with the 73rd Regiment of the 19th Reserve Division, in whose staff Werner was meanwhile serving. In this way Hans could, as it were, rehabilitate himself. Blomberg did not experience the younger brother's death at Charleroi with feelings of guilt on this account; he understood it as one of the highest distinctions that a soldier could attain. Hans died the celebrated "sacrificial death in war," or, as Blomberg expressed it in his memoirs, "the soldier's death, which is the noblest form of dying." The second brother too, Hugo, fell in the First World War, in 1918. In the Second World War, Blomberg's two sons too were to die the "sacrificial death on the altar of the Fatherland."

Shortly after Hans's burial near Charleroi, the 19th Reserve Division crossed the French border on 28 August 1914 in the area of Avesnes in order to fight at Étreux. Its stormy advance brought the division into a critical situation, since the X Army Corps advancing east of the division had been held up at the Guise sector and had fallen back about forty kilometers. Without knowledge of this, the division, which was just regrouping for the encirclement of the fortress of La Fère, was attacked on the morning of 29 August by several French divisions. Blomberg brought up reinforcements, so that the French had to break off the attack and withdraw. The victorious battle of St. Quentin that followed this combat offered Blomberg — if we follow an assessment of his person by the IIb of the division, Major Dennke — one of the few opportunities of his career for "personal intervention in the foremost line."

Via Laon his division marched on to the Marne. In the Battle of the Marne, 5 to 12 September, during which Blomberg's division fought in the area of Montmirail, Schlieffen's Cannae of vast dimensions, the rapid encirclement and destruction of the French troops, failed. The battle thus became the symbol of the failure of the core element of the German war plan and destroyed the illusion of German

invincibility.

When after the war the Reich Archive in Potsdam searched for reasons for the German defeat, the then Major von Blomberg was approached with the request that he record his personal recollections of the Battle of the Marne and the condition of the 19th Reserve Division. Blomberg recalls the prevailing and continuing “feeling of superiority” when the 19th Reserve Division crossed the Marne at Dormans–Château-Thierry. During the decisive battle on the Marne he had witnessed a mass attack by the French infantry in which, not far from the Petit Morin, a German unit of battalion strength was completely wiped out. Although he experienced many such attacks in the war, this experience was of paradigmatic importance for him. The mysterious âme collective of mass armies and the old question of their disciplining began to fascinate him lastingly and would never let him go again.

With the failure of the German attack on the Yser and before Ypres, September to November 1914, the war of movement froze into positional warfare. At the transition to positional warfare Blomberg’s division was immediately east of Reims. The divisional staff initially had its command post on Fort Réduit de Berry, which offered a fantastic view over Reims, for which reason visitors often appeared. This lively traffic on the fort had not escaped the French, and therefore frequent fire attacks occurred. Blomberg, who on 14 September had been the first man in the 19th Reserve Division to receive the Iron Cross Second Class, was lightly wounded in October 1914. Blomberg himself felt it to be providential that he had not lost his life that autumn: an enemy shell had struck precisely the stone doorstep of the entrance to the shelter in which the divisional staff had taken cover because of the shelling. As a result, only a few shell splinters could enter the interior of the shelter, and Blomberg was only lightly wounded.

The chief work of the staff consisted in organizing and supervising the extension of the position. The front sector itself remained quiet. No major combat actions took place until February 1915. This changed when Blomberg’s division was pulled out in order to be deployed as part of the 3rd Army in Champagne. Heavy losses in mid-April 1915 made it necessary to pull the division out again. After a short assembly in the Montmédy–Longuyon area, the X Reserve Corps, whose other division had been concentrated in the same area, was transported at the end of April to Alsace as army reserve. Here the 19th Reserve Division went into rest quarters in the area southwest of Strasbourg at the foot of the Vosges. Blomberg, a major since 22 March 1915, spent there a few restful spring weeks, which were filled with the training of the new replacements. On 18 May 1915 the division, ready for employment again, was deployed as an independent division in the Munster Valley in the Vosges. The impassable mountain landscape, which now made Blomberg’s work more difficult, was made bearable for him only by its scenic beauty.

In the following year Blomberg and his division were thrown into the fighting around Verdun. On 23 March 1916 the 19th Reserve Division took over a front sector in the northern sector directly west of Fort Douaumont, which became the terrible symbol of the Battle of Verdun. The great German offensive against the French Meuse fortress, 21 February to the end of June 1916, with which the Chief of the Supreme Army Command, Erich von Falkenhayn, wanted to wear down the French army by “bleeding it white,” was initially experienced by Blomberg as a success. What caused him difficulty in the long term was the continuation of positional warfare with the associated phases of enforced inactivity. He did not experience the bloody, cruel everyday life of the trenches; their course was revealed to him by the view into the situation maps.

In attacks that Blomberg had helped plan and that were conducted with gigantic expenditure of matériel, the division succeeded in throwing the opponents back out of the forward trenches and taking

about 5,000 prisoners. Despite further captures and considerable gains of ground, the face of the “hell of Verdun” soon showed itself to Blomberg. In his division alone, during the fighting that became synonymous with the totality of combat on the Western Front, there were 10,000 casualties in one and a half months. Because of his knowledge of the German position at Fort Vaux, he was entrusted with the evacuation of the terrain. On 20 July came the news of his appointment as Oberquartiermeister, Ia, in the General Staff of the XVIII Reserve Corps at Verdun, a position he was to hold from 21 July 1916 to 24 February 1917. The corps was deployed on the right wing of the 2nd Army.

Major General Count Friedrich von der Schulenburg, Knobelsdorff’s successor as Chief of Staff of the 5th Army, had become aware at Verdun of Blomberg’s military abilities and his organizational talent, and advocated his designation as Oberquartiermeister at the headquarters of the 7th Army in Laon. After he had attended a ten-day course in gas warfare in Berlin and had seen his family on this occasion, Blomberg took up his new position, which he held from 1917 until the dissolution of the 7th Army in January 1918.

The command area of AOK 7 reached from the Oise at La Fère to Brimont north of Reims. Chief of the General Staff of the 7th Army was General Walther Reinhardt. During the great defensive and offensive battles of 1917 and 1918, Blomberg stood beside him as Ia in the General Staff — thus in the battles at the Chemin des Dames. He was impressed by Reinhardt’s “gift as an army leader, his organizational abilities, and the suggestive force with which the general knew how to exert influence on the troops.” From now on Reinhardt was to exercise a determining influence on Blomberg’s strategic and tactical ideas and to assume for the later War Minister the function of a model.

His achievements in the staff predestined Blomberg for his later role as a military shaper of the future. They were acknowledged in 1918 with imperial Germany’s highest order. On 3 June 1918 he received from the hand of Kaiser Wilhelm II the Pour le Mérite.

Even though Blomberg’s former certainty of victory had been slightly shaken by the course of the war so far, in spring 1918 he does not seem even to have considered the possible failure of the final German major attack seeking decision, the “Michael Offensive” — psychologically entirely understandable.

Through his position as the highest General Staff officer under the Chief of the General Staff, he was necessarily confronted with the decisions of the First Quartermaster General of the 3rd Supreme Army Command, General Erich Ludendorff. In his memoirs he describes how, after the decision of the leadership of the 7th Army to withdraw “leading elements” from the Marne, an enraged Ludendorff arrived at army headquarters in order to control the operation personally. Two days later Ludendorff had to admit that the correct measures had been taken. What he experienced decisively influenced Blomberg’s assessment of German strategy and military leadership, and a certain caution toward the decisions of military superiors hardened in him. He perceived visits by government officials to the front with contempt, which was to darken permanently his later view of politicians. In his memoirs he describes: “They [the politicians, the author notes] made a miserable impression, and one could not believe that this kind of people could help us nevertheless to win the war.”

When the German offensive ebbed away and the 7th Army began its withdrawal, Blomberg unwillingly admitted to himself that victory could no longer be obtained. He saw the alternative to victory in a variation of the Peace of Hubertusburg of 1763. The reality of the armistice conditions and the terms of the Versailles Peace Treaty were to destroy this illusion.

At the end of January 1919, after a chaotic withdrawal, the 7th Army reached its headquarters in

Marburg and was dissolved there. After four and a half years of war, Blomberg returned to his family in Hanover. With that began for him, as for an entire generation, the painful process of mastering war, defeat, and the collapse of the monarchy. The political consequences of the military defeat of 1918 delivered a traumatic blow to the special social position of the officer corps and of each of its individual members. The feeling of an existential crisis prevailed everywhere. In the confusions of the revolution of 1918–19 the Republic of Weimar was born, and with it the “pitiful creature of the new army,” as the then Major Joachim von Stülpnagel mockingly called the small army of the Reichswehr.

The restrictions of the peace treaty degraded the once so proud imperial army into a veritable “miniature army.” Article V of the Treaty of Versailles provided for the reduction of the army to 100,000 men, and also the abolition of universal conscription, the prohibition of the Great General Staff, the War Academy, and all mobilization preparations. Heavy artillery, air formations, and armored formations were likewise not granted to the “miniature army.” In addition, compliance with the treaty provisions was to be monitored by a comprehensive inter-Allied control system. It is understandable that the collective wish awakened to transform this “pitiful creature of the new army” again, and that the shaking off of the trauma of Versailles, the revision of the treaty, became a goal common to almost all political forces of the Weimar Republic.

The First World War had triggered in Blomberg contempt and, as he calls it, a “not obtrusive, but ever-present spirit of contradiction against the usual conventions.” He no longer wanted to accept what was treated as given and established, and he searched for new paths under the “current of a waiting, searching inner tension.” He describes his feelings after the German defeat as follows: “The war had (...) taken from me my security in material and intellectual-spiritual life; instead a continuing and all-embracing insecurity set in.” The war had triggered in him a general aversion to “all things that appeared sanctified by habit and agreement.” In his eyes it had destroyed the traditional Prussian concepts of war and had made clear at a stroke that the previous paths of military thinking were worn out, that the inherited doctrines of the art of war were obsolete. From now on, in Blomberg’s thinking and action, an attitude prevailed that pressed toward reform and innovation and made him an opponent of all military traditionalists.

After his return from France, the then major was at first without employment. After a short stay with his family in Hanover, tired of doing nothing, he already wanted at the beginning of 1919 to join one of the numerous Freikorps that, as an answer to the existing chaos in the country, were springing up everywhere like mushrooms. Service in a Freikorps appeared to him to be the “only point of support one could seize if one wanted to remain a soldier, and almost the only way out of being able to make oneself useful in the confusions of the days.” Only a severe fever, of which he writes in his memoirs, seems to have prevented him from putting this plan into action.

It must be emphasized that the Freikorps, in their whole nature, represented a conscious negation of the traditionally military. Their understanding of obedience, based on the charisma of leadership, was a declaration of war against the concept of discipline of a regular army. Blomberg too criticized the indiscipline prevailing in the Freikorps, but nevertheless sympathized with the front-fighter spirit ruling in them and with the new revolutionary soldier type recruited from the Freikorps, which appeared interesting against the background of disappointments over the failure of the old imperial army. Unlike General Seeckt, who in the first years of the Republic conducted a “ruthless struggle against the relics of the Freikorps spirit” — “everywhere it showed itself” — the mixture expressed in the Freikorps of revolutionary longing, political soldierdom, adventurism, archaic loyalty of followers, and youth-movement romanticism corresponded to Blomberg’s own ideas. In Hitler and the later General Field Marshal von Reichenau he was after 1933 to find like-minded men in this respect and, together with

them, to create a new soldier type.

An inquiry by the Supreme Army Command established in summer 1919 that Blomberg was available and ordered him to the “border fortress” Kolberg. He became representative of the Supreme Army Command in the Reichswehr Committee of the War Ministry, a department for the reorganization of the army under Lieutenant Colonel Kurt Hasse, in order from October to become a desk officer in the newly emerging Reichswehr Ministry. Blomberg thus received the chance to take part in building the new army. His initial enthusiasm about this, however, had very soon to be scaled back, and he had to recognize that the development of the Reichswehr would not proceed according to his ideas. The reason for the differences of opinion in the Reichswehr Committee, in which Blomberg was involved, was not primarily the difficulties brought with them by the gradually emerging incomprehensible peace conditions of the Allies, but a noticeable gulf between the officer generations represented in the committee, which was from now on to remain dominant. The younger officers in the Reichswehr Committee in many cases wanted to enter into a radical break with what had been handed down, and also to assert themselves against the older men in many questions of army organization, equipment, and clothing, but they failed because of the latter’s resistance. It would not, according to Blomberg, “enter their heads that what had died off and passed away (...) could not be revived.”

Although the younger officers, for example, succeeded in ensuring that there was no return to the colorful prewar uniforms, but that the field-gray color of the wartime uniforms was retained, their wish for a new cut of uniform, which departed from the supposed stiffness and impracticality of the old tunics, failed on the veto of the older men, who said that the desired form would make the uniforms too similar to those of the enemy. As Reich War Minister and co-shaper of the Hitler myth, Blomberg would modify the uniform according to his ideas and on the model of the Luftwaffe officer uniforms.

FAREWELL TO THE OPERATIONAL IDEAS OF THE SCHLIEFFEN ERA

After the lost war there were numerous controversial interpretations of the reasons for the German defeat. The stab-in-the-back legend and the guilt that, according to need, was placed on the home front, the troops, or the politicians, could not, however, prevent the insight that in the war, in the military-strategic sector, serious mistakes had been made. Blomberg, who still for many years after the end of the war searched for reasons for its outcome, criticized, like many, that the General Staff had transferred the experiences from the Boer War, 1899–1902, and the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–1905, in Manchuria too little to the First World War. He remembered a disturbing “self-satisfaction in the army,” which derived from the successes of the war of 1870–71 and had brought with it “a certain stagnation.” “On the whole,” he judges, “the German army (...) was an outstandingly good instrument of war. It was an animated machine of the best construction (...). It possessed a good and reliable noncommissioned officer corps and a brilliant officer corps. The achievements of the front officers were very good, those of the General Staff even excellent.” Only “the higher leadership corps did not correspond to the quality of its instrument,” according to Blomberg’s dictum. For him, the Battle of the Marne had not been lost by the “fighting troops, but by a weak higher command.” A great commander or a dictator with suggestive force could have brought about a different outcome of the war. Instead, the General Staff had practiced “consequential personnel policy,” had “called overaged commanders onto the stage,” and had “dug up old Nibelungs who could no longer satisfy the unexpected demands of the war. (...) First among all, the physically worn-out Moltke was no longer at the height of his powers.”

Such a verdict on Colonel General Helmuth von Moltke, the nephew of the “great” Moltke, was not

unusual. In the postwar period Moltke was readily stylized into one of those “commander scapegoats” who had to bear the guilt for the strategic errors made in the war and for the German defeat. The common denominator for the accusations against this group, to which Moltke belonged, was their “sins against Schlieffen’s spirit,” through which they had gambled away “certain victory.” Schlieffen’s doctrine — and this was the decisive point — thus remained free of guilt. The reason for Blomberg’s dislike of the “old Nibelungs” of the world war, however, was not a Schlieffen apotheosis. Rather, he considered the strategic errors of the Schlieffen Plan and the stubborn holding fast to it a decisive reason for the German defeat. For him the Schlieffen Plan was an expression of “unfruitful dogmatism.”

Fundamental criticism of Schlieffen became audible in the years after the war not only in Blomberg. The historian Hans Delbrück asked in 1923 in a newspaper article whether the German General Staff had not stiffened into an unfruitful dogmatism, which had then resulted in the loss of the world war and the fall of the German Empire. Criticism of Schlieffen and his legendary plan, however, corresponded in no way to the common opinion within the General Staff; deviations from Schlieffen’s views were rather energetically attacked. “The war,” asserted Schlieffen student Friedrich von Boetticher, “has refuted none of his [Schlieffen’s, the author notes] views”; “whoever accuses Schlieffen of one-sidedness has penetrated only superficially into his world of thought,” Werner von Fritsch seconded him in 1936 in a foreword to the new edition of Schlieffen’s bestseller *Cannae*.

Thus the Schlieffen school remained predominant even after the war. Schlieffen’s students, with a flood of writings on the master’s military philosophy, significantly influenced the presentation of the First World War and the development of a theory for future wars down to the Second World War.

An important function in this belonged to the Reich Archive on the Brauhausberg in Potsdam, which was occupied with the presentation of the First World War. The staff of the Reich Archive under its president Hermann Ritter Mertz von Quirnheim, who from 1916 to 1918 had been a department chief in the Supreme Army Command and since February 1919 had been Oberquartiermeister for war history in the Great General Staff, consisted mainly of members of the Schlieffen school, who strove to preserve as far as possible the tradition of war historiography of the old General Staff. The convictions of this interest group formed the framework for the publication issued by the Reich Archive of the mammoth work *Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918*, comprising fourteen volumes and two special volumes. Strictly speaking, this war presentation, the “war work,” of the Reich Archive was only a semi-official publication; but since no official work exists, the Reich Archive work is regarded in Germany and everywhere in the world as the official German presentation of the war.

In the 1920s the department of the Reich Archive that was concerned with the treatment of the fighting on the Marne in September 1914 addressed Blomberg too with an interview questionnaire for officers. With his statement, the Reich Archive wanted to “make lively use of all influences and effects of the events [on the Marne] and supplement the often incomplete file material (...) on the personal side,” and asked him for field-post letters, diaries, and other notes that might help document the experience of the battle in the West being investigated. Of special value to the Reich Archive seemed information on the following points: “mood of the troops, combat impressions [feeling of superiority or inferiority toward the enemy], events that presumably will not be presented in the files, or only incompletely or colorlessly, behavior of the French rural population, small war, espionage (...), special personal impressions and position taken toward the domestic and foreign literature published so far.” Blomberg, who in any case doubted the usefulness of “war history,” found scarcely a good word for the work of the Reich Archive. He stated, to be sure, that he possessed no notes from the days of the Marne battle, which did not correspond to the facts, but nevertheless — despite all aversion toward the Schlieffen

students in the Reich Archive — answered their questionnaire dutifully and conscientiously.

Among the Schlieffen students were the most influential generals of the Reichswehr. Wilhelm Groener was one of Schlieffen's most ardent admirers; Generals Hermann von Kühl, Hugo Freiherr von Freytag-Loringhoven, a member of the study commission of the Reich Archive, and Hans von Seeckt followed him. Groener's admiration of Schlieffen, tending toward transfiguration, found its literary expression in his two major military-theoretical writings *Der Feldherr wider Willen: Operative Studien über den Weltkrieg*, 1930, and *Das Testament des Grafen Schlieffen*, 1927.

When the Schlieffen Association was founded in 1922, Seeckt could not appear at the first meeting of the association for political-tactical reasons. As Chief of Army Command he wanted in any case to avoid being suspected by the republican government of being connected with a monarchist society. Schlieffen's spirit stood for the tradition of the Prussian-German army.

It is hardly surprising that Blomberg did not belong to the "Schlieffen fanatics and encirclement dogmatists," by whom some people felt themselves pursued in the corridors of the Bendlerblock. Rather, he belonged to the unorthodox minds within the Reichswehr who called the master's teachings into question or even broke with the Schlieffen tradition, which was equivalent to distancing oneself from the Schlieffen students. Even if Schlieffen divided the military spirits of the time, General Hermann von Kühl was nevertheless right in one respect: in 1924 he could state that Schlieffen "was the teacher of the whole older generation of General Staff officers who went into the field in 1914 (...) and the young General Staff officers too were educated in his spirit." An entire generation of General Staff officers had been trained and shaped by Schlieffen before the First World War.

Blomberg too had learned Schlieffen's gospel at the War Academy and was thus shaped by his almost fanatical prepossession with "encirclement," which during Schlieffen's period of office had led to a complete neglect of all defensive training of the German army. Blomberg remembered that "exaggerated offensive cult" of the great Schlieffen: "The troops and the General Staff had not learned much of the nature of the defensive and its technique. The repelling power of defense was underestimated." Thus "we went (...) into the First World War under the dogma of attack, without our armament having corresponded to it. The dogma of attack (...) failed."

The course of the war in the West had shown Blomberg the effective power of the defensive and had, as he himself put it, led him "through a high school of defensive combat." Nevertheless he did not absolutize the defensive. He saw in it no strategic method for winning a campaign or even a war, "for one can overthrow the enemy to full victory," as the later General Field Marshal knew, "only in attack." Rather, he understood the defensive as a means of preventing a defeat and as a possibility for preparing an operation — whether through a counterattack against an exhausted attacker or by tying down strong fire forces while an attack occurs elsewhere.

In his exercise programs developed in the postwar period, he tried new tactical forms intended to overcome the traditional offensive doctrine. Thus he practiced the "bait movement," which combines strategic offensive with tactical defensive, like sword and shield. Instead of attacking a strongly defended position, the enemy is lured out of his position and induced to make a rapid advance or a premature attack. One lures him into a trap, exploiting his confusion in order to be able to conduct the counterattack. The bait was to consist of a feigned withdrawal or an unexpected thrust threatening the enemy's rearward communications. In defensive measures in connection with machine guns Blomberg saw a kind of panacea. He writes: "If the OHL [Supreme Army Command, the author notes] in 1918 had decided, instead of offering the armistice, on a withdrawal of the German front to the Rhine with

the resulting shortening of the front and the impulse of the struggle for the soil of the homeland, the war would have turned out differently.”

For Blomberg, thinking in defensive strategies corresponded not only to the real weakness of the German army in the war and later in the Reichswehr; it also meant a conscious departure from the great operational ideas of the Schlieffen era. To be sure, he neither wanted nor was able to break with all of Schlieffen’s military ideas, which would also have been foolish. Even though he assigned high importance to the defensive and gave more weight to breakthrough than to encirclement, Blomberg never regarded the idea of annihilation as erroneous and remained, in other military questions too, a student of Schlieffen. The exercises of the Reichswehr, which from 1924 as Chief of the Army Training Department and from 1927 as Chief of the Truppenamt he played a decisive part in developing, bore Schlieffenian features. The standard solution for the given tasks in a war game carried out near Berlin in 1926–27 under the cover designation “Elbe” consisted of attacks from encircling movements against one or both flanks. Blomberg functioned in this war game as chief umpire. Above all, on one central point Blomberg was wholly in harmony with the ideas of the great prophet of annihilation war: in the assumption of the necessity of mass armies.

THE FIRST TEACHER: WALTHER REINHARDT

In his emphasis on the defensive, Blomberg moved entirely along the line of the military philosophy of his teacher General Walther Reinhardt, who was regarded in the Weimar Republic as the “most eloquent advocate of the strength of defense.” The last Prussian War Minister was Blomberg’s declared model, with whose basic organizational, educational, tactical, and technical views he usually agreed.

This is especially significant because Reinhardt, until his death in 1930, was the most renowned opponent of Seeckt’s theories of strategy and tactics and — as his pupil Blomberg later would be — was regarded as an outsider within the officer corps.

Blomberg had been placed at Reinhardt’s side in the war as chief of staff. From then until 1925 he was to be his “closest collaborator” and “most attentive and grateful pupil.” Looking back, Blomberg judged his long-time superior to be “a selected officer of the highest intelligence and complete training, (...) who knew and accomplished much and understood how to transfer the tension of his highly developed nature to his subordinates and collaborators. [...] He had a great gift as an army leader”; in short: for Blomberg, Reinhardt was “one of the most important soldiers of the older generation.”

Like Blomberg, Reinhardt too was shaped by experiences on the Western Front. The battles at Verdun, on the Somme, and on the Aisne had made him an expert in defense. It was not without reason that during the war Reinhardt was given the nickname “defensive lion of Laon.” He saw the First World War from a perspective similar to that of the French. He had dealt intensively with the French theory of the *guerre de longue durée* and believed that mass armies and firepower gave the advantage to the defense. War of movement was for him a thing of the past; in fact it was the form of war of the future. Semi-mobile war, in which, as in 1918, firepower had proven to be the decisive factor of the offensive more than mobility, became his most important tactical concept.

Alongside belief in the effectiveness of defense, belief in the force of a people’s army belonged for Reinhardt to the foundation of his defense thinking. In direct contrast to Seeckt’s conception of a militia that served only as a replacement reservoir for a professional elite army stood Reinhardt’s

conviction about the power of the masses, for “the numerical superiority of usable fighting forces is and remains one of the strongest factors of success,” as his apodictic thesis put it; “wrong,” by contrast, were all those “who believe that one could ever have too many good soldiers.”

While Blomberg fully agreed with Reinhardt’s views, the opposition between Reinhardt and Seeckt was striking not only in military respects; the two generals were also vehement opponents in many questions of politics and had no sympathy for one another. Reinhardt’s recommendation in 1918–19 to reject the Versailles Treaty and offer military resistance against the enemies in the East, to “call the nation to arms like Scharnhorst in 1813,” ran counter to the positions of Seeckt and Groener.

In military respects Reinhardt, who was shaped by Machiavelli’s *Dell’arte della guerra* of 1521, in which the advantages of conscription over mercenary armies were praised, and his pupil Blomberg tried out new tactical forms in the years 1920 to 1924 and tested new training concepts with machine guns. Blomberg benefited from Reinhardt’s much-praised talent as organizer and trainer of the army, and the Reinhardt school made him into a specialist in questions of organization and training, as he was to prove from 1925 as chief of the Army Training Department of the Truppenamt and in 1927 as chief of the Truppenamt itself. Reinhardt had the vision of a unified high command of the army. It was to become one of Blomberg’s great organizational achievements to expand this idea and construct a command system on the basis of which the Wehrmacht then conducted the Second World War.

When Reichswehr Minister Otto Gessler on 18 April 1920 ordered the formation of a mixed brigade at Döberitz, near Berlin, Reinhardt, who had resigned as Chief of Army Command, was appointed its inspector and commander. Major Blomberg became his chief of staff. The military instructional troop in the Döberitz Heath was available to the Reich government as a mobile reserve, in order to spare it the necessity, in case of need, of drawing on the individual military district commands by taking away troop formations. “Physically capable members of the Reichswehr” were to be trained here under especially strict conditions. The aim was “to fructify the training regulations of the Reichswehr still to be shaped.”

Blomberg experienced the time in Döberitz as especially instructive, because in the exercise brigade Reinhardt’s principles of training and education could be tested and “new and thoroughly unusual paths” could be taken. Here Blomberg could also devote himself to questions of army motorization, in which he had had a special interest since the war.

The “spirit of Döberitz,” the radical political mood that formed the character of the brigade and caused Reinhardt serious headaches, was not experienced by Blomberg as disturbing in his drive for modernization.

Reinhardt’s military-scientific interest was directed especially toward the theoretical further education of officers. The inclusion of psychological insights was very important to him in this. Twice weekly he assembled all officers and officials of the Döberitz Brigade for a discussion, which served primarily to clarify questions that had arisen during training. In addition, lectures were held, in which Reinhardt himself spoke on topics that seemed especially important to him, such as principles of training and foundations of “manly discipline” in the army. Officers invited to Döberitz gave lectures on topics ranging from the economic consequences of the Versailles peace and the Battle of Tannenberg to horse diseases before, during, and after the war.

With the so-called Reinhardt Courses, after his departure from the army in 1927, the general created a model example of military-theoretical further education for officers. Under his direction, twelve

excellently qualified General Staff and troop officers at a time were trained in a two-year course at Berlin University, where above all they could study history, mass psychology, and national psychology. Their military knowledge was to be furthered in order to train them for assignments at the level of operational command. The model for these courses, as Walter Görlitz sees it, may have been “the former custom usual in Württemberg, in view of the absence of its own war academy, of assigning officers to the university so that they could complete their education there.”

Blomberg, like his teacher, constantly occupied himself with the military-theoretical further education of officers, and it is certainly no accident that the establishment of the Reinhardt Courses in 1927 falls during his period in office as Chief of the Truppenamt. After a journey to the United States in 1930, he suggested expanding the Reinhardt Courses into a German “War College.” Under Blomberg’s aegis the Reinhardt Courses were to be realized in modified form in 1935 in the Wehrmacht Academy.

After the Second World War Reinhardt was judged more benevolently by some military historians than Seeckt. While he was praised as the “democratic general of the Weimar Republic,” who was prepared for reconciliation with democracy and for the building of a republican army, Seeckt embodied “the strict old-Prussian tradition” and the restorative character of the Reich army. In the officer corps, however, Reinhardt’s openness toward the Republic and his Württemberg origin had made him less popular. The General Staff of 1918 to 1919 preferred Seeckt over Reinhardt as army chief also because the officers saw in Seeckt a guarantor for the preservation of the tradition of the old officer corps, while Reinhardt had shown that he was prepared to break with traditions.

For Blomberg it was not only Reinhardt’s soldierly qualities and the far-reaching agreement with his operational, strategic, and tactical views; it was also training and army motorization that made him Reinhardt’s pupil. It was the general’s readiness to go down new military paths — even if for the sake of reconciling army and Republic — that made him the suitable ally for Blomberg.

Even though Blomberg saw in the Republic a fetter upon the military, he had “to a certain degree come to terms” with the political situation and the “unsympathetic form of state,” as he notes in his diary; he had “grown accustomed to the unimaginable.” For him above all “the question of monarchy or republic had entirely lost significance.” He saw it as a question “completely of second rank,” “not because the Republic would be better than the monarchy, but because the Republic is there, because every legal attempt to bring back the monarchy brings bitter civil war. [...] In addition, the return of the monarchy would reopen the whole question of the federal princes.” For Blomberg there were “really weightier questions, the answers to which decide the fate of the nation.”

Standing close to the DNVP, the then lieutenant colonel held to the highly fatal maxim of the “apolitical” soldier, fatal because ultimately still political, as Seeckt demanded it of his soldiers. Looking back, he states: “This apolitical quality never had the meaning that we were in agreement with the system of the former government [the Weimar Republic, the author notes]. It was rather a means of protecting us from too close an entanglement.”

How different the political views of Blomberg and Reinhardt really were is difficult to judge. What is certain is that the “Württemberg democrat” Walther Reinhardt in no way always lived up to this reputation. In many political and military questions he was more Prussian than most Prussian generals. Just as little can Blomberg, in his enthusiasm for the outsider Reinhardt, be called a “convinced democrat,” as Walter Görlitz does. Reinhardt’s basic political attitude did not, however, prevent the later War Minister from following his teacher in military matters. That Reinhardt’s political attitude did not necessarily disturb those who thought differently is also emphasized by Count von der Goltz, who

led the United Patriotic Associations: “My relationship to the one who died too early [Reinhardt, the author notes] can best be characterized by saying that it was the rare case in which two men of politically different attitudes nevertheless understood one another especially well militarily and humanly.”

Despite harmony in the military field, Reinhardt and Blomberg always had a distant relationship. This, as Blomberg explains it, was above all due to Reinhardt’s inclination toward asceticism, which he could not share. Reinhardt also seemed to him “in small things sometimes an eccentric,” in whom “in everyday life one could not overlook a Swabian provincialism which sometimes brought with it narrowness and, instead of breadth, missteps in bearing.”

It was to remain characteristic for Blomberg that he always followed an adviser; soon, however, others came to the foreground.

THE “YOUNG GENERATION”

Even after the First World War a phenomenon became visible which often occurred after great wars, and often even during war: an accelerated shift of generations, going to the point of precipitousness. This shift brought forth throughout Europe a new military-philosophical and military-publicistic school of modern-thinking officers.

Werner von Blomberg, although, as shown, he always moved somewhat apart from the mainstream, must be connected, within the structure of intellectual-military currents of his time, with this young generation of military reformers, military publicists, and military writers, who moved wholly in the consciousness of being part of a “Young Army,” a spiritual elite striving for reform and renewal in the army. This group of military men, to which he belonged, wanted to distinguish itself from the orthodox military policy of the older General Staff officers, bound to Prussian traditions, in order to inaugurate a new epoch of war history. Similar reform processes to those in the German army could also be observed after the First World War in the French and English armies. In Germany, however, there was, once again, a special development: after 1918–19, alongside a far-reaching civilian militarization, there occurred a veritable escapism into military utopias, which is to be understood as a compensatory reaction to the feeling that Germany’s material and personnel resources were inferior to those of potential or real opponents. These utopias are reflected in a form of extensive military writing typical of the Weimar years. That in military thought the aspect of the future is constitutive was never so clear in German history as in the 1920s, and the image of the war of the future drawn by the military writers determined to a high degree the military planning and measures of the Reichswehr.

The extremely well-read Blomberg did not himself act as a military writer. Unlike many generals of his time, from his pen there flowed — apart from a war-historical outline of the battles at the Chemin des Dames in 1917 — no operational studies or even military-philosophical essays. His character inclinations made him rather a born receptor: he was an intellectual, an idealist and enthusiast, who was quickly fired by new thoughts and ideas. The reverse side of this undogmatic openness and of his spirit turned toward everything new was a certain passivity, paired with his nature inclined toward romantic-fantastic conceptions, which made him highly influenceable.

Many contemporaries felt this too. The British military theorist Basil Liddell Hart, who met Blomberg in 1932 during the Geneva Disarmament Conference, describes him as follows: “Blomberg was by

nature an enthusiast and regarded the craft of arms in the spirit of a wandering knight. (...). He showed a lively interest in new military ideas, especially in those which held out the prospect of a new artistry in the tactical field in the sense of a game of skill, but he was still more enthusiastic about the idea of awakening the law of chivalrous conduct of war. He became almost lyrical when one spoke of an appeal to 'decency' in war. Anyone who has observed soldiers in high positions at close range for a long time tends toward skepticism, but Blomberg made on me the impression of unusual integrity, even if he professed his faith somewhat childishly. Tall and broad-shouldered in build, he was neither arrogant nor brusque in intercourse, but combined a natural courtesy with a refreshingly unconstrained form of conversation."

Blomberg was rather an intellectual eclectic than a creative mind. Whoever, however, calls him for this reason "alien to reality" is unable to think in contradictions and overlooks his sober, soldierly-calculating side and his unconditional will to military power.

Against this background it is of decisive importance which military writings Blomberg received and into which military-publicistic camp within the Reichswehr he is to be placed. The period after Reinhardt, by Seeckt's decision to dissolve the Döberitz Brigade, was appointed commander of Military District V, was formative in this respect. Blomberg, lieutenant colonel since 1 October 1920, followed Reinhardt on 1 April 1921 as chief of staff to Stuttgart, and thus experienced the restless putsch and crisis years of the Republic far away from the Berlin Bendlerblock and without influence on the military policy of this time. The prosperity of the prewar years had been thrown off its hinges by inflation, and Blomberg's family lived through a period of economic poverty that could be buffered only by the generosity of Charlotte's mother.

Among Blomberg's tasks as chief of staff of the 5th Division were its training and supervision, as well as the preparation of exercise journeys and maneuvers. Increasing emphasis in the exercise cycles in the Stuttgart military district, which comprised the states of Württemberg, Baden, Hesse, and a part of Hesse-Nassau, was placed on the use of vehicles. The military-political efforts were directed entirely toward hollowing out and circumventing the provisions of the Versailles peace treaty.

As for the majority of all Germans, so too for Blomberg the Versailles Treaty was an "imposed condition with which one could not reconcile oneself." The prohibition of the Great General Staff especially outraged him; it was "childish," as he explained in a lecture in 1928, "for every specialist must be clear about this — there is no factory without engineers." "One had," as his conclusion ran, "to do everything forbidden in disguise and hidden, and brace oneself with all force against the pressure." In this sense Blomberg, as chief of staff in Stuttgart, covered secret Reichswehr weapons stores and intensified cooperation with the Black Reichswehr.

The Black Reichswehr denoted militarily formed legal and illegal paramilitary organizations. The purpose of these formations, which appeared from about 1921 onward, consisted of two goals: first, the circumvention of the Versailles Treaty, and second, the establishment of a reserve army. The Black Reichswehr became, also because of the unknown number of trainees, who were recruited mainly from right-wing organizations, a specter for the Allies and for the German government of a treaty-violating "secret army." Blomberg therefore consistently tried to withdraw cooperation with the Black Reichswehr, which took place "in the twilight of camouflaged preparation for renewed military capacity," from surveillance by the Inter-Allied Military Control Commission, and also to keep it as secret as possible from the German government. The weapons on which members of the Black Reichswehr were trained consisted essentially of rifles, machine guns, and a small number of light guns. How small these weapons stocks actually were is already apparent from the fact that a defense

plan against a Polish attack provided for the raising of only one division beyond the permitted seven divisions. Structures for border-defense formations had not been ordered.

The Stuttgart years were for Blomberg years of introversion and reflection on the falling apart of the old army, the sudden collapse of the old world, and the chaos of the postwar period resulting from it. In these years there began for him, as for many of his contemporaries, a search for an absolute, for something wholly new, for an answer to the questions of present, past, and future. Blomberg sought and found answers to his questions of meaning in conversations with other officers, but mostly in books. The closedness toward his family and immediate surroundings that was typical of him arose from the fact that he liked to withdraw into his inner world and read a great deal or write in his diary, for which in the Stuttgart years he evidently had sufficient time. Alongside a flood of French, English, American, and German novels — he often read four books at once — he received military journals that concerned themselves with the military development of other countries and with the situation of the Reichswehr, felt to be hopeless. He showed himself especially fascinated by biographies, books on psychology and philosophy, as well as by popular “worldview writings” such as Spengler’s *Decline of the West*. In this time he also dealt with great interest with the controversial theories of the Jewish philosopher Otto Weininger, which were later instrumentalized for fascism. Above all he read the popular military writings, biographies, and memoirs of other officers, which reflected and enlivened the military-theoretical discussion of the 1920s. In *The Human Being and the Battle of the Future*, a book that Blomberg read and that fascinated not only him, Georg Soldan describes Blomberg’s ideal conception of modern military leadership, which no longer follows operational laws but obeys the laws of mass psychology and of the army’s “spiritual power of resistance.”

By contrast, Blomberg rejected conceptions of war such as those represented by the Schlieffen pupils or by Friedrich von Bernhardi, “bound to the Prussian tradition,” in his 1920 work *On the War of the Future*. This was due both to Bernhardi’s rather conventional image of future war and to his inclination to absolutize the offensive and his glorifying image of Schlieffen. More interesting for Blomberg was the military journalism popular in the 1920s, which amounted to an anticipation of the theory of total war as Ludendorff was to postulate it in 1936, and in which the vision of a future war of movement and people’s war was evoked with the help of the most modern technical means of combat.

In dealing with future war, weapons-technical innovations claimed his special attention. Precisely because the gas weapon, the further development of the tank, and military aviation had been withdrawn from the German military by the Treaty of Versailles, theoretical occupation with them gained special significance. Still more important than the influence of weapons-technical developments on future warfare was, for individual military writers, the demonstration of the significance of wide areas of national life for the course of war. The First World War had shown that the war of weapons was only one component of the total war event. Meanwhile, military-publicistic discussion concerned itself with a more or less complete militarization of society. The seemingly unavoidable compulsion to prepare war — in theory — already in peace thus connected itself with wish-images of ensuring, through a militarization of the nation, the comprehensive and constant availability of material and personnel resources.

Blomberg eagerly filtered the cultural and political currents of his time. In the arsenal of thought of his diaries there are National Bolshevik tendencies. These have their roots less in the “National Bolshevik wave,” which, to quote Armin Mohler, “arose like a fever in the year 1923, when in the occupation of the Ruhr and inflation, social and national emergency coincided for the second time in the young Republic,” than rather in a foreign-policy National Bolshevism. The “Russophile trend” demonstrable in Blomberg began with his early advocacy of Seeckt’s military alliance with the Soviet Union and

with a great interest in the state, culture, and politics of the country. It was to continue in a later pro-Russian military policy, which made him, as Chief of the Truppenamt, one of the most important promoters of the connection between the Reichswehr and the Red Army.

Around 1923 Blomberg for the first time dealt intensively with the time-defining political mass movements Communism and National Socialism, or national socialism. When the Hitler putsch in 1923 drew increased attention to the existence of National Socialism, he commented on the event at length in his diaries: “The Bavarian tempo hastened ahead of the factual. If National Socialism had been lifted from the baptismal font by better hands, without these brutal, narrow-minded, demagogic men, then good could have come of it. It is a fallacy,” he reflects further, “to believe that we can rise only through old-style nationalism and even to think that a national rising could serve reactionary goals. Even if it should happen so, nothing true would have been gained. The national primal force of a violated people cannot be directed toward true, that is, lasting and future-pointing goals without the other primal force of these times, socialism — to use an ambiguous word in an entourage of misunderstandings. The *völkisch* idea is secure for the future! (...) National Socialism will be the nearest future, even if the present realization in Bavaria will hardly be more than a confused and in many respects untrue prelude.” He continues: “National Socialism could have brought an approximation of the masses to the thin leading strata that stand alien to capitalism and its villainies.”

About Communism he writes: “The other future movement is Communism, which, however, can only be a world religion. Now it is either a distorted nationalism, as in Russia, or a mob uprising, as it showed itself in armed rage in Germany. It will fail, but the communist ideal will transform itself and, recast, perhaps finally be the faith for the next 1000 to 2000 years.”

The concept of mass, as Marx had coined it for industrial development in the nineteenth century, had suddenly shown the extent of its validity in the battles of material of the First World War. Blomberg too, as already mentioned, had felt this with full force in the western theater of war. From then on, fascination with the phenomenon of the mass never released him. In any case, “mass” had become a key concept of the 1920s. In military circles people reflected under what auspices future wars, in times of the modern mass society of the twentieth century and with masses difficult to control, could be waged at all. In contrast to many of his contemporaries, however, Blomberg did not understand the mass as a negative force, since he interpreted it, in the sense of the Wars of Liberation, as a military gain; he believed and hoped that there was a solution to the old problem of its disciplining. In a conversation with the Danzig Minister President Hermann Rauschning, he is said later to have confessed that during his journey to Russia he had found the “way to the masses” and that the example of their disciplining, as he experienced it there, almost made him a Bolshevik and then a National Socialist.

Already the etymology of the word mass points to its military and political function: the German word derives from the Greek *maza*, bread dough, and *massein*, to knead. It is the idea contained here of the unformed, which can be stamped and shaped from outside, that is also found again and again in Blomberg’s writings. “The mass,” he philosophizes in 1922 for example, “is unreasonable, unformed, instinctual: (...), but in its subconscious there nevertheless lives the good. Call it what one will: freedom, justice, progress, or something else. To be sure, the good is realized only through the creative life of individuals — thin strata at most (...).”

That it was the art of leaders and commanders to guide the masses had already been known by Gustave Le Bon in the nineteenth century. The magic word was *Psychologie des foules*. Receiving Le Bon, Sigmund Freud investigated after the First World War, in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the*

Ego, the binding of the individual in the mass to the person of the leader. Freud's psychoanalytic approach also affected the ideas of some military theorists. Thus it affected a General Staff officer of the 5th Division, Colonel Wolfgang Muff, who was surely not accidentally one of Blomberg's closest friends.

The overreaching colonel understood himself as a kind of war philosopher and channeled this self-image into an extensive literary activity that he made accessible to the public in contemporary military journalism. His chief interest was the propagation of a psychologically grounded military pedagogy. For his military path of thought, the teachings of Jung and Freud were of fundamental importance. As Muff explained to his readers, "psychoanalysis gave valuable pointers" and showed him "paths that until now were completely unknown or at least untrodden."

Muff's ideas about a reform of the army had a great effect on Blomberg, and the colonel became during the Stuttgart years one of his advisers in military-philosophical questions.

Muff unquestionably belongs to the unknown figures of history, and only a few statements can be made about his life path. He was not to make a major career in the Reichswehr, although Blomberg repeatedly advocated for him and finally, in his function as Reich War Minister, procured for him in 1933 the post of German military attaché in Vienna, which he then held until 1938. Blomberg characterized his friend Muff as "worldly and diversely gifted," as a man — and this was for Blomberg the central point of his approval — "who stood open to all currents of his time and in the sphere of art and spirit pursued everything new with intensified interest."

The colonel himself saw himself with his military-philosophical theories in the circle of influence of the so-called Psychological School within the Reichswehr. Even if Blomberg does not express himself in his diaries expressis verbis on the theories of the military men belonging to this school, one can nevertheless — proceeding from his personal notes, his acceptance of Muff's ideas, and also because of the special features of the theories of the Psychological School, which *prima vista* formulated a break with the Seecktian tradition — put forward the thesis that he stood intellectually very close to the theories of the school.

The founder of the Psychological School was a veteran of the Western Front. The first lieutenant named Kurt Hesse had challenged the General Staff's model of war and, in a forward-looking and much-noted work with the programmatic title *The Commander Psychologos*, 1922, formulated a new military theory. In numerous subsequent books and articles, the later initiator of the National Socialist war-propaganda film *Victory in the West*, 1940, called into question the traditional path of studying war experiences through military-historical analysis. For him it was certain that the old imperial army and the old General Staff had lost the war because they understood nothing of individual and mass psychology. The inclusion of a deeper psychological understanding in battlefield tactics became for him the secret key to victory in the next war. The first lieutenant was convinced that all officers and noncommissioned officers should undergo thorough psychological instruction and, citing Freud, saw psychological teaching as an absolutely necessary component of soldierly education. Hesse was very conscious of his closeness to Ernst Jünger, and many of his conclusions were similar to Jünger's. He glorified the front soldier, and in him too the "German soul seeks suffering." Hesse therefore counted Jünger among the representatives of the Psychological School. Blomberg had already met Ernst Jünger in 1920, when, from 24 July to 1 October, thus before his transfer to Stuttgart, he led Reichswehr Brigade 10 in Hanover. Blomberg was lastingly impressed by Jünger, who was among the first lieutenants. Later he counted Jünger's popular writings among his preferred works.

Times of crisis are birth hours of messianic bringers of salvation and redeemers. The messianic-chiliastic thoughts formulated in Hesse's Commander Psychologos corresponded to Blomberg's hopes for a messiah, which he shared with many of his contemporaries. His diaries of these years identify him as seized by a disease typical of the time — that search, characteristic of the Weimar years, for meaning and for a savior who would bring the solution to all the problems of the age. Robert Musil accurately describes the “need for redemption” of his contemporaries in his novel *The Man Without Qualities*: for the late phase of the Weimar Republic it was true that everywhere — in politics, in churches and cafés, in books and art journals — there was talk of “redeeming” and redemption. This messianism typical of the time also raged in circles of the Reichswehr. Thus many generals, together with Blomberg, dreamed of the unlimited rule of a charismatic “ruler of souls,” a “Commander Psychologos,” as Hesse called him.

Hesse's hymnic vision sounds ghostly and seems to anticipate the future development: “And so one day he will announce himself, he for whom we all wait full of longing, who today deeply feel Germany's distress in our hearts. [...] Whence he comes, no one can say. Perhaps from a princely palace or a day laborer's hut. But everyone knows: He is the leader, everyone cheers him; everyone also obeys him. And why? Because he exercises a peculiar power; he is a ruler of souls. And for that reason he is also called the Commander Psychologos.”

The answer of the General Staff officers around Seeckt to Hesse's “heretical writing” came from Seeckt's friend and biographer Major Friedrich von Rabenau. The title of his programmatic book *The Old Army and the Young Generation* is to be understood as an answer to Hesse's *Of the Near Era of the Young Army*. The author attempted therein a comprehensive refutation of Hesse's military philosophy. Other leading members of the Truppenamt too were outraged by Hesse's theories. General Adalbert von Taysen complained in a writing on infantry tactics about Hesse's “completely confused effusions,” and Major General Wilhelm Wetzell wrote in the *Militär-Wochenblatt*: “One is astonished at the views of a young officer about the old army, which he never truly knew. Our magnificent old army, which for 100 years was the great educational institution for the whole German people (...) the army which during the terrible four-year war showed the highest military art of all time.” Seeckt, who after all had already introduced modern psychological tests in the Reichswehr, added ironically, in view of Hesse's lack of respect for the tradition of the General Staff, that a school of military scribblers had recently discovered a new commander, General Psychologos.

While Seeckt quietly mocked, the image of the “Commander Psychologos” solidified in the intellectual fund of the later War Minister. His search for a redeemer was to perpetuate itself until January 1933 and find its fulfillment with Hitler's seizure of power.

At Muff's suggestion, Blomberg had begun in Stuttgart to study the writings of Rudolf Steiner and Leopold Ziegler and regularly attend lectures by both. What especially fascinated the later General Field Marshal about Ziegler's idealistically shaped philosophy of art and culture and Steiner's theosophical speculations about the occult were the affinity to the Asian world of thought and the question of a unity encompassing all areas of life. His preference for anthroposophy and theosophy made him appear extremely suspect to other generals and later earned him among his comrades the reputation of an eccentric and “theosophical enthusiast” who floated “in other regions.” And indeed: this turn toward esotericism and occultism was, even if by his own admission he stood quite critically toward Steiner's theories, extremely unusual for a German nobleman of Prussian and Protestant origin. In this connection it should be noted that later, among early National Socialist opponents and resisters, there were to be found precisely many officers who had a “living bond to the Christian religion”; this certainly did not apply to Blomberg.

Illuminating is what Blomberg wrote in his diary after a Steiner lecture on 29 January 1924: “I do not go further with him. Not at all in his otherworldly paths and not even in this, that through spiritual exercises the otherworldly realm can be won. The path there leads for me through illumination, conception, conversion, rebirth — in short through a ‘miracle,’ not through working it out.”

Of still greater effect on Blomberg’s image of world and war than the enthusiastic teachings of the anthroposophists was the cultural and life philosophy of Count Hermann von Keyserling. The count had become famous at a stroke with his *Travel Diary of a Philosopher*, published in 1918. In 1920 he had founded in Darmstadt the School of Wisdom and the Society for Free Philosophy. Until 1927 annual conferences were held, at which such different popular speakers as Leopold Ziegler, August Winnig, Peter Behrens, Leo Baeck, and Alfred Adler spoke. Less well-known speakers too, such as Wolfgang Muff, gave lectures in the School of Wisdom.

Muff was a “wanderer between worlds” in that he knew how to move as securely on the military floor as on the “spiritualized” one of the School of Wisdom, where he gave numerous lectures. He was a great admirer and friend of Count Keyserling and tried to transform Keyserling’s philosophy onto a military-philosophical level. That he succeeded in this very well seemed to be the view not only of Blomberg but also of the count himself: a Christmas card of 1922, which Keyserling sent to Muff, he dedicated to “his dear head of the class and model pupil Wolfgang Muff as a sign of his benevolence and as an incentive to further achievements.” Although this message, which Keyserling signed “senior teacher,” was undoubtedly meant as a joke, it gives information about the sect-like character of the school.

Muff’s departure from the Society for Free Philosophy took place in 1935, at a time when the count’s ideas increasingly began to displease the National Socialist rulers. Keyserling was deeply struck and disappointed by his former model pupil, who after “13 years of trusting collaboration” separated from him rather coolly.

It is surely no accident that Wolfgang Muff in 1925 proposed to his teacher Keyserling the young Kurt Hesse as his own substitute for a lecture in the School of Wisdom. Whether Blomberg was present at Hesse’s lecture on discipline and authority is not transmitted, but it may be assumed, since he regularly attended the lectures of the school. Hesse’s lecture was, in Keyserling’s view, a “failed performance of monstrous damage for the German army” and “the worst stab in the back which the German army could have received before public opinion.” Evidently the philosopher had not yet understood in which “worldview” direction his ideas could be appropriated.

Muff had understood it, and his interpretation of Keyserling transferred to the military world had a great effect on the later War Minister, who read Keyserling’s writings with enthusiasm, attended lectures at the Darmstadt school, and personally came to know the count through Muff. Keyserling’s philosophy offered — not only in its processing by Muff — the possibility of transfer into the military; beyond that, it gave answers to many questions that were leitmotivic for Blomberg. This can be shown by the example of the natural- and historical-philosophical reflection *The Newly Arising World*, which was well known to Blomberg: here Keyserling, close to Spengler, states “a decay of culture after the defeat and the political overthrow.” By this, however, was meant not a downfall of culture as such or the downfall of Occidental culture, but “an end of all traditional culture.” “All old tradition is being unavoidably shaved away by advancing technology. With its unlimited possibilities of application, ever more independent of space and time, technology,” according to Keyserling, “destroys all bonds of the old kind. [...]. For the masses — and only the masses decide in the age of technology with its unlimited

possibilities of mass transmission — everything traditional and thus never provable no longer counts.” “Into two worlds,” Keyserling writes, “the survivors of traditional culture and the still traditionless and tradition-hostile masses, which will consist of the technicized primitives, separate.” “But with fundamental certainty” the count claims to predict “what condition-like thing will take the place of the old. From the identity-relation of becoming and passing-away it follows first that the end of the old is already the birth of the new.”

Keyserling too now lets appear that leader type who understands how to guide and influence the masses. “Bolshevik leader, fascist chieftain, and western European economic leader no longer resemble in any way the traditional leader-phenomena of the old time, but they do resemble one another in their outstanding and unconcerned intelligence, the intuitive command of their task, and the psychological capacity to guide the primitive masses. Such leaders work suggestively (...), where they are still lacking there rules chaos or stagnation.” Shortly thereafter there appeared in the *Militär-Wochenblatt* the reaction of Wolfgang Muff: an essay titled *The Newly Arising World and the Soldier*.

These key concepts, which entered Blomberg’s intellectual fund in the early 1920s, were also to remain decisive for his later thinking. In his function as Reich War Minister, he was later to intervene, in dispute with the Propaganda Minister, for the publication of Keyserling’s writings, which under Goebbels’s rule over the printed word were not exactly popular, since Goebbels saw in Keyserling a “philosophical windbag.”

In summary it can be stated that the later General Field Marshal was shaped by the ideas of the military reformers and innovators of his time, the ideas of the “Young Generation.” Beyond that, in his personal need for redemption, he had drawn from the intellectual fund of his self-appointed prophets. His openness to the intellectual world of National Socialism was prefigured: the formula was the employment of mass armies, drilled by techniques of social-psychological influence and led by a charismatic “ruler of souls.”

ON THE WAR OF THE FUTURE

On 11 January 1923 there occurred what political observers at home and abroad had feared for weeks beforehand: French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr district, while Lithuanian troops marched into the Memel territory.

In Germany the mood triggered by the invasion of the Ruhr recalled the atmosphere of August 1914, and through the ranks of the military there passed a storm of indignation. The invasion of the Ruhr meant — without even a single shot having been fired by the Reichswehr — a first military defeat for the 100,000-man army finally established in 1921. The Reichswehr did not dare intervene. Its seven divisions would have had ammunition for only one hour of combat.

Blomberg notes in his diary: “On 11 January the French marched into the Ruhr district as a sanction for a ridiculously small underdelivery of wood and coal, initially occupied Essen-Bochum, and are proceeding there as in the occupied Rhineland, even though they officially deny a military occupation and speak only of a delegation of engineers. [...] May this damned France reap with terror what it now feels in the drunken stupor of its so-called victory. May Germany, down to its last man, feel what disgrace is being done to us. May internal disputes rest, in order to direct our hatred and our strength wholly outward! [...] The French must be thrown out; for that the people must first be prepared

inwardly, then materially, and the political world situation must be shaped accordingly — with England? In any case with Russia!”

On 15 January Seeckt, in a dramatic appeal in the *Militär-Wochenblatt*, publicly expressed the dark mood within the officer corps. He emphasized that, if it came to the worst, the path of the French troops to Berlin would lead “through streams of blood.” “The enemy,” according to the general, had “through his insolent incursion torn up the peace dictate” and “forced” the Reichswehr “into a war of liberation.”

At the end of January, in the Berlin Truppenamt, the first reflections arose — born of military impotence — on how that war of liberation announced by Seeckt was to be conducted. The given military-political situation evoked the memory of the mythically transfigured time of the Wars of Liberation. First studies appeared that drew an analogy to that time more than a hundred years earlier, in which the Germans had freed themselves from French “foreign rule.” Blomberg too, who during the threatening military-political situation frequently traveled to Berlin in order to take part in discussions in the Reichswehr Ministry, thought he knew that “one was already writing 1809.” In the Truppenamt, however, the people’s war remained only a wish, for Seeckt was clear that with the 100,000-man army of the Versailles Treaty no military adventure could be dared. The officers had to recognize their inability to defend the country. The Weimar Republic was militarily defenseless.

This led to an intensification of the army’s previous secret and fruitless armament efforts. Temporary volunteers were enlisted on a large scale, and working groups and associations of völkisch coloration were mobilized in all parts of the country. There were also military men who were not satisfied with the passivity of the Reichswehr leadership and wanted to use the prevailing “genuine war mood.” The industrialist Fritz Thyssen and retired General von Watter planned the formation of a voluntary underground military organization in order to conduct a guerrilla war against the French. Erich Ludendorff, who represented elements of the Freikorps and the extreme Right, offered the government the services of these paramilitary groups, while at the same time claiming that he could not guarantee complete obedience to Seeckt and the army. An arrangement that Seeckt naturally rejected. Lieutenant Colonel von Blomberg too was disappointed over the passivity of the Reichswehr leadership. He reflected: “In Berlin orientation toward struggle — war of liberation under favorable domestic and power-political conditions, thus only in years! But the burdens imposed by conquest-hungry France can hardly be endured for so long; France itself too will not maintain the present tension for years, so that a crisis-like solution, that is, a war, will probably assert itself sooner. Very unfavorable for us, but probably unavoidable like a fate.”

An officer friendly with him thought similarly to Blomberg. The then Lieutenant Colonel Joachim von Stülpnagel — chief of the Operations Department of the Truppenamt, T1 — had during the Ruhr crisis first developed a kind of guerrilla-war doctrine. In place of the strategy of annihilation of Schlieffenian tradition, Stülpnagel set a strategy of exhaustion. What hovered before him was the “small war,” that is, a guerrilla war, similar to what decades later was to be practiced successfully in Vietnam and Afghanistan. Seeckt, however, rejected the lieutenant colonel’s idea, since he regarded guerrilla war as an impracticable strategy. In addition, he supported the government in its view that passive resistance was the best way out of the crisis. Nevertheless he allowed Stülpnagel to build up a sabotage organization financed by the Reichswehr.

Stülpnagel began to reflect on whether and how a war of liberation could be conducted under the given circumstances, though, like Blomberg, he did not consider it immediately realizable — “one was only writing 1809!” — and came likewise to the conclusion that such an uprising could take place in “perhaps two years.” In his reflections on a war of liberation, however, Stülpnagel came to a very

concrete result. His thoughts, which he had first presented in February 1924 to a larger circle of officers, he fixed in 1924 in his memorandum *Thoughts on the War of the Future*. He sent Blomberg a copy of his concept to Stuttgart. Blomberg was enthusiastic, and in a letter to Stülpnagel of 1 February 1924 he declared his complete agreement with the memorandum: "I am so entirely of your opinion in the sober recognition of the facts and in the burning will to change things!" Blomberg's operational views were from now on to be influenced by Stülpnagel's *Thoughts on the War of the Future*, and in the coming years they were to be tested in many war games and exercises and examined in detail for the degree of their usefulness. The war games designed in the Truppenamt, thus significantly also by Blomberg, in 1924 against France, in 1925 and 1927/28 against Poland, and in 1928/29 against France and Poland, stood on the foundation of Stülpnagel's operational ideas.

Stülpnagel's concept of warfare, however, did not reach the level of a strategic calculation, but remained — despite realistic components — the theoretical and also desperate attempt to seek a way out of a situation felt to be unbearable: "The day will come when the German people will throw their slave chains clattering to the ground and tear apart the Versailles dictate, for only the call to arms can (...) bring liberation," Stülpnagel oracularly declares. "France," according to his verdict, "is Germany's mortal enemy." Either Germany capitulates forever, or it attempts once again in a great uprising with weapons to decide the question "whether 100 million Germans must become the slaves of 40 million Frenchmen."

Under this basic assumption Stülpnagel designed the concept of a national people's and liberation war in Germany's border regions, which, however, could also be brought about by a preventive strike by France, which supposedly held in its hand a "sadistic plan" worked out for years. At the center of his reflections stood the concrete question of how a war between Germany and its western and eastern neighbors, France and Poland, was to be conducted. Stülpnagel sketched the foreign-political constellation that had to exist if the undertaking was not to be condemned to failure from the start: "We must again take up Prussia's position of 1813, then as now playing for the being or non-being of the state, in order to bring about the intervention of other powers against France." Like Blomberg, he came to the conclusion that this required the benevolent neutrality of Great Britain and support from the Soviet Union.

Stülpnagel demanded a transformation of domestic and foreign policy in favor of making people and state militarily capable, and stated that the future war "will demand the commitment of the whole people's strength — that is universal conscription," and that all preparations of the state and of the armed force could reach their goal only if they stood "in harmony with the will of the majority of the people." Without intensive cooperation with the civilian functionaries of the nation, the "war of liberation" could therefore not be conducted at all. In order to reach this condition, he considered a "complete transformation" of internal conditions necessary and named program points whose implementation would have had to transform the Republic into a regime of the highest degree of nationalism and militarism.

Stülpnagel was, however, clear that for the foreseeable future the opening of war would amount only to a "heroic gesture." Yet "a certain premonition," he quotes Gneisenau, tells him "that the day of revenge will come." The period that he estimated for the preparations for this day lay "rather at five than at ten years." If the people's war in the border zones of the Reich was to have the effect intended by Stülpnagel, it had to be militarily organized — and in this circumstance lies the explosive nature of the concept. It extended from the establishment of border defense for the intended delaying resistance, to the construction of a guerrilla organization for the occupied territory, to preparatory measures for evacuation and demolition of artificial structures. There was hardly any administrative measure that

could not be made serviceable to “total people’s war.”

The primacy of the military over politics, which clearly comes to expression here, corresponded to Blomberg’s own ideas of combat, as did the strategically defensive method of combat of a national liberation war conducted with high mobility. The chances of success of guerrilla warfare convincingly presented in *Thoughts on the War of the Future*, the radicalization of warfare, which became reality in the Second World War, the assumption of the necessity of a conscript army and of a militarization of the nation, indeed even Stülpnagel’s vision of the “heroic gesture,” were shared by Blomberg.

In his acceptance of Stülpnagel’s war concept, a connection of realistic assessment and irrational determination of aims, Blomberg cannot, however, be understood as a “backward-looking people’s-war romantic” who dreamed of a return of the Wars of Liberation. Rather, his reflections amounted to a break with the Seeckt school. In the Stülpnagelian and Seecktian conceptions of war, two opposed tendencies of modern war crystallized. In his memorandum Stülpnagel had considered factors that went far beyond Seeckt-style armed war. Like other officers of modern stamp, he had recognized that old-style armed war depended to a high degree on the unrestricted support of a nation ready for war, and therefore demanded domestic-political measures for its militarization. In place of Seeckt’s operational armies there appeared total liberation war, organizationally prepared down to the detail, in which the whole territory of the Reich is a theater of war and heavy losses among the civilian population are calculated in.

Stülpnagel’s conception of the war of the future did not remain a nonbinding thought experiment. With it began in 1924 that planning which envisaged a secret transformation of the 100,000-man army — in a way difficult to understand — into an army of 2.8 million. One notes today with some astonishment that in the year 1939 precisely these 2.8 million, organized in 102 divisions, stood ready. Surely no coincidence.

THE TURN AWAY FROM ROMANTICISM: CHIEF OF THE ARMY TRAINING DEPARTMENT (1925–1927)

Blomberg writes in his memoirs: “In spring 1925 I had been chief of staff in Stuttgart for four years. Now the new assignment had come close. I reckoned with the position of a battalion commander, which would probably soon be followed by a regimental command. (...) It turned out differently; for I was transferred to Berlin, into the Reichswehr Ministry, as Chief of the Army Training Department, T4.” While the time in Stuttgart had been, in military respects, a theoretical interlude, the great distinction that transfer into the Berlin Truppenamt meant gave Blomberg direct influence on the military policy of his time. The appointment as Chief of the Army Training Department, which went together with promotion to colonel on 1 May 1925, also meant an indirect recognition of what Blomberg had learned from his teacher Reinhardt about the training of soldiers.

Blomberg reports in his notes that departure from Stuttgart, although it meant a promotion, was not easy for him, and that despite the family’s economic poverty in these years he had privately been very happy there. In fact, as his youngest daughter also reports, these were years in which the Blomberg family life passed especially harmoniously.

In Berlin the family had luck in looking for an apartment, which was often not easy during the great housing shortage of the time. In the street Alt-Moabit there stood, in a park, a large villa. Originally in

the possession of the industrial family Borsig, it had housed in the last decades of the Empire the General Command of the Guard Corps. Here, in the old General Command, the Blombergs were assigned a large apartment. "In it," he recalls, "we lived through four happy and rich years, on which we gladly looked back. In it we celebrated our silver wedding and the green wedding of our eldest daughter."

His feelings as department chief T4 were ambivalent. On the one hand he was satisfied with the new task, for with it "a wide view and sphere of action opened"; here "the work was no longer directed at one division but at a whole army, even if it was small." On the other hand, he was now confronted in the Reichswehr Ministry with one of his future "favorite enemies" and that man's clique: "I now had insight into a clique-system led by the then Lieutenant Colonel Schleicher, to which I absolutely did not belong and into which I did not intend to fit myself." In fact, from now on tensions with the powerful Schleicher, head of the newly founded Wehrmacht Department in the Reichswehr Ministry, were to be the order of the day, and Blomberg must, as Hilmar Ritter von Mittelberg supposes, often have felt the influence of the Schleicher clique in the corridors of the Bendlerblock to be "unfriendly." Whether, however, Blomberg even became the "crystallization point" of an "opposition" against Schleicher, as Andreas Hillgruber thinks, must be greatly doubted.

The personality of the then lieutenant colonel Kurt von Schleicher was and remains controversial. Unquestionably he, who from 2 June 1932 to 29 January 1933 would be the last Reichswehr Minister of the Weimar Republic, was the most politically gifted military man of the Reichswehr and one of the most powerful figures of Weimar politics. The beginnings of the "fairy-tale career" of the Brandenburg native lay in the year 1913. During his service as captain of the railway department in the Great General Staff, he had developed a friendly relationship with his superior, General Wilhelm Groener, 1867–1939, who from then on protected Schleicher and was even to declare him his "adopted son." From 1918 Schleicher became Groener's constant adviser and his cardinal in politics. When on 1 March 1929 the Ministeramt in the Reichswehr Ministry was brought into being and the adjutancy directly subordinate to the Reichswehr Minister, the budget departments of army and navy, and the press office were combined, Schleicher became its chief.

The omnipresence of Schleicher in Reichswehr policy did not bring him only sympathies within the officer corps, and assessments such as the following were not rare: "General von Schleicher! At least the title sounds soldierly. But he is only a pale, politicking office general." In research too he has often received, certainly also looking back on his misconduct in the late phase of the Weimar Republic, an unflattering assessment. Thus Wheeler-Bennett writes: "He was vain, unscrupulous and faithless (...). Above all Schleicher was a man of cross-connections and intrigues; the constructive side of his character was darkened by his presumptuously vain inclination for intrigues (...) and never did a man bear a more fitting name." Blomberg would probably have described Schleicher no differently. Not only outwardly was the small, bald man the exact opposite of the new T4 department chief; the two officers also differed fundamentally in their view of the relationship between Reichswehr and politics. While Blomberg concentrated wholly on the highly problematic maxim of the "apolitical" soldier, Schleicher thought and acted politically.

Blomberg belonged, as Chief of the Army Training Department, to the closest collaborators of the Chief of Army Command, Colonel General Seeckt. From then on he was confronted almost daily with this "mythical figure of the Reichswehr," which, as his notes show, he regarded with thoroughly mixed feelings.

Seeckt had guided the Reichswehr along a stony path through the putsch and crisis areas of the years

1919 to 1923, and had given to the position of Chief of Army Command, which he held from 1920 to 1926, a unique significance. He had decisively shaped the operational and tactical views of the army, and his great reputation as a military theorist is well founded.

Among Seeckt's greatest achievements unquestionably belongs the reestablishment of the forbidden General Staff in the form of the Truppenamt of the Reichswehr. Already in June 1919 Seeckt had declared in a letter to Hindenburg that he did not want to be the gravedigger of the General Staff and that, even if its form could no longer remain the old one, he still wanted at least to preserve its spirit. He had succeeded excellently in this, and he endeavored to bring as many proven General Staff officers as possible into the leading positions.

Seeckt's view was that the Reich had to be made capable of alliances again with the help of armed power. Only through a position secured in foreign policy would the foundation be laid for reconstruction and the upswing of the economy. In this view it was shown that Seeckt remained attached to the categories of Wilhelmine foreign policy. With the Soviet Union the general believed he could gain the alliance partner with whose help Germany would again be able to play its power-political role in Europe. The loose military contacts with the Soviet Union existing since 1920 were therefore promoted by him, regardless of all ideological oppositions.

The topos of a "unified Reichswehr" of Seecktian stamp is, from today's perspective, no more than a myth, since Seeckt's theories were by no means accepted uncritically by all officers. In central military conceptions, Blomberg, pupil of Reinhardt and "modernist," was almost an anti-Seeckt, which did not, however, mean disdain for his superior. Rather, he recognized Seeckt's greatness and valued him, especially in retrospect, despite all differences of opinion. The collision course resulting from substantive discrepancies was nevertheless preprogrammed. Blomberg's new service area as Chief of the Army Training Department included, alongside troop training, the training of General Staff officers and the selection of the officers to be examined. Since the War Academy too was forbidden by the Versailles Treaty, the Reichswehr had developed a decentralized program and distributed the training of General Staff officers among the individual military districts.

As chief of Department T4, Blomberg had to supervise the training courses, set final tasks, take part in General Staff journeys or lead them himself. Inspection journeys to the armies of other countries also fell within his service area. In July 1926 he traveled with two further officers of the Truppenamt to Budapest. He had the assignment of inspecting Hungarian troop training grounds and, as Seeckt's representative, negotiating with the Hungarian Regent Nikolaus Horthy on military and political themes. In spring 1929, as Chief of the Truppenamt, he traveled once more to Hungary in order to attend the dedication of the grave of the unknown soldier in Budapest. He met again with Horthy and obtained an overview of the organization and command of the Hungarian army.

It also belonged to the duties of Chief T4 to accompany the Chief of Army Command on his journeys to the troops, to individual exercises, or to maneuvers. Blomberg experienced the long time spent in the motorcar with Seeckt as extremely strenuous, since Seeckt was not only a difficult superior but — in contrast to Blomberg himself — also an "unshakable silent man." After the Kapp Putsch, Blomberg had very much welcomed Seeckt's appointment as Chief of Army Command, since he supported Seeckt's military alliance with Russia and valued Seeckt as an "important soldier" and "foundation-layer of the Reichswehr." Yet the relationship with his new superior proved extremely difficult. Blomberg regarded the peculiarities of Seeckt, the "sphinx with the monocle," as the general was secretly called by his subordinates, with reserve.

After one of the first meetings he noted in his Stuttgart diary in 1921: "General Seeckt is a cool egotist, married, as compensation, without children to a lady who does not make a pleasant impression (...)." A later characterization was friendlier: "Intercourse with Seeckt was worth every effort, and everyone who had to do with him had to take pains to come to terms with this peculiar man. That was not always easy, but I highly value that my fate led me into his proximity. He was the last Guards general of Prussian style; a type often attacked, but certainly highly and characterfully developed. Life had spoiled General von Seeckt from the beginning. He was the son of a commanding general who had been ennobled. His youth had passed under the living conditions of a 'general's brat,' as they said in Berlin. He had been an officer in one of the most distinguished Guard regiments and had married a rich, charming woman in her youth."

Blomberg valued the arrogant narrowness of the officer caste, which Seeckt's appearance seemed almost to parody, just as little as Reinhardt's modesty, and the habits of life of the two men separated them once again.

"The Seeckt couple," Blomberg knew, "had no children. Mrs. von S. had therefore neglected to separate herself from her youth in good time, so that in her older years she appeared quite original but also somewhat grotesque, though her good and warm heart somewhat compensated for this. Her social ambition drove her to keep a house and to take part in elegant hotel life, including dancing. The general distanced himself somewhat from this breathless activity, but the possession of name and money, of elegance and social position, also played a role with him. And why not? As long as I was still a grass widower I visited Mrs. von S.'s receptions now and then; later we gave that up, for the visit of modest officers' wives was indifferent to her and the merely snobbish participation had no attraction for us. The Seeckts lived in a beautiful official apartment in the building of the Reichswehr Ministry in Bendlerstraße. Under them the rooms had an elegant appearance; under the successors Heye and Hammerstein, who had large families, the apartment took on a more familial appearance. [...]. The bachelor Fritsch left the greater part of the rooms as a cold and rarely used splendor."

Blomberg's conflict with Seeckt, however, did not unfold primarily along personal lines, but along military differences of opinion. The experience of the Ruhr occupation in 1923 had caused doubts in many younger General Staff officers about Seeckt's military and personnel policy. This displeasure, as it also came to expression in Stülpnagel's memorandum on the war of the future, swelled in the following years into an avalanche of fundamental military criticism of Seeckt. In the eyes of his critics, Seeckt was braking the development of the Reichswehr, had become passive, and was preventing every refreshing and rejuvenation in the leading posts. Stülpnagel complained that Seeckt had "lost much of his former elasticity [...]. He was satisfied with what had been achieved in the Reichswehr and inclined to resignation in all political and military questions [...]. In national defense no progress had been made for years." Blomberg seconded him: "Seeckt had to go when the tasks of laying the foundation were finished."

In political respects Seeckt was unquestionably a traditionalist, for whom the Bismarck Reich and the monarchy counted as ideals. He remained wholly attached to the categories of Wilhelmine foreign policy and basically assumed the continued existence of the prewar constellation in Europe. In military respects too he remained attached to the past, since he, and with him many older General Staff officers, was not prepared to accept the inner-military, political, and social consequences of the use of new means of war and to reshape the military organization accordingly. Without regard to the reality of the age of "total war," for him "the destruction of the enemy army, not the destruction of the country (...)" was still the highest law of the art of war.

Around 1924–1925 a veritable front had formed in the Reichswehr Ministry against Colonel General Seeckt. According to Seeckt's then adjutant, it included "besides Schleicher also General von Stülpnagel [T1, the author notes] and also (...) General von dem Bussche [Ippenburg, T2, the author notes]." Blomberg, who in military, though not in political, respects thought quite similarly to these officers around Schleicher, was — even if the opposite was claimed — no front-man. He distanced himself very energetically from the "Schleicher clique" and returned the dislike shown him by Schleicher to the same degree. In his memoirs he can scarcely conceal his aversion to the "office general," and he does not want to.

Thus Blomberg remained rather an outsider who went his own special professional way, which, however, was diametrically opposed to Seeckt's ideas. Blomberg became one of the most massive critics of his superior and of the ideas of his staff. The fact that he saw in Seeckt the embodiment of the "last Guards general of Prussian style" made it impossible for him to follow him. He had to come to the conclusion that "Seeckt had to go when the tasks of laying the foundation [of the Reichswehr] were completed." "Only then," he writes, "could one take up preparation for the future."

That Seeckt was not innovative in his military thinking had been clear to Blomberg already at his first encounter with the general. As a desk officer in the Reichswehr Committee he had observed in 1919 in Kolberg that the prewar traditions of the army would also determine the future development of the Reichswehr; for that reason he did not want to see in his superior the military leader par excellence or even a substitute monarch. Such categories were foreign to him. Rather one can say that he saw in him an anachronist par excellence. Seeckt could not embody the type of the modern, suggestive dictator as Keyserling, Spengler, and Hesse anticipated him. Also, unlike Blomberg, he regarded as suspect everything that smelled of "front experience, nationalist enthusiasm, and soldierly activism." For Blomberg's "struggle for the implementation of new-spiritual aims in the Reichswehr by novel paths toward them," Seeckt was not equipped.

Blomberg, who had recognized that his "suggestions for further development of the Reichswehr found no receptive ground with General von Seeckt" and who neither could nor wanted to reconcile himself to this finding, nevertheless pressed Seeckt vehemently toward changes in the Reichswehr. Above all he wanted to drive forward army motorization. Once he proposed to Seeckt that the lance be abolished among the cavalry as an attack weapon, in order to increase the firepower of the cavalry. Seeckt categorically rejected this. That would not be especially remarkable if it were not precisely in the "lance question" that the symbolic gulf between military traditionalists and modernists in the Reichswehr showed itself clearly. The absurd discussion about abolishing the lance — the symbol of the tradition-rich cavalry — was conducted in the mid-1920s in the Truppenamt and in military-publicistic circles. The decisive question, often unspoken, was whether cavalry was still timely at all. The supporters of the lance — mostly older cavalrymen — praised above all its traditional and moral significance. Seeckt, who propagated the usefulness of a "modern cavalry," wondered at "some prophets" who already saw "whole armies transformed into armored machines and the replacement of horse riders by motor warriors" as accomplished. Blomberg belonged to those "prophets" who were entering the military scene throughout Europe — one need only think of General de Gaulle. He no longer believed in the "myth of the striking power of the cavalry," since for him it no longer corresponded to the requirements of modern combat. As Chief of the Truppenamt, he had the lance finally abolished in 1928.

"Finally," Blomberg describes the reform efforts in the Truppenamt, "we younger men had summarized our thoughts on the necessary development of the Reichswehr in a longer report. In this report above all the formation of a Führerheer as the framework for a major rearmament was developed and proposed

[...]. The entire training and education of the troops had to be aligned accordingly. Our thoughts about armament and equipment, including motorization, were once again summarized. The document at that time did not find a good reception from General Seeckt. His marginal remarks were quite unfriendly and his final judgment annihilating. Apparently General von Seeckt was under the impression that we younger men wanted to teach him better. But we wanted only to express something sober and factual, and had chosen the written path only because orally one could not get a word in.”

In Blomberg’s memoirs it says: “It was attributed to Seeckt that he had systematically trained an elite army as a leadership cadre for the future Wehrmacht. That was — politely expressed — only a half-truth. In truth it was far from his mind to regard the Reichswehr as a cadre formation and as a Führerheer and to direct training accordingly. For he emphasized generally the advantage of the small professional army over the people’s army. The Führerheer and a timely training and armament, for example motorization, found in Seeckt not a promoter but rather an opponent. What was later collected about it by officious people was a purposeful construction. Only General Heye and his closest collaborators could turn onto the path that led to a modern army. Before that, this was prevented by Seeckt’s rigid will. His attitude still had an effect later in the army. In the new Wehrmacht it cost some effort to free the army from it.”

Seeckt’s only hesitant response to the idea of the Führerheer thus corresponded to his belief that the future belonged to small, highly mobile professional armies. Perhaps it was to a certain degree the case that Seeckt made a virtue out of necessity, yet one can see in his thoughts rather the antithesis to the concept of mass armies, as they had been introduced in the French Revolution, investigated and analyzed by Clausewitz, and praised by Schlieffen. Here the circle closed that in more recent times began with the small mercenary armies of the cabinet wars, was continued during the wars of the nineteenth century and the World War, and finally ended in the search for a way out of the slaughter of the long-lasting trench war. For Colonel General von Seeckt, the masses of the people’s army were of secondary importance. The experience with the mobilized masses in the World War had triggered in him a vehement aversion to their unstable and radical character. Added to this was the knowledge gained from defeat that Germany could not possibly win in a multi-front war. Like Hegel, Seeckt defined the mass as the mere opposite of spirit, namely as spiritlessness.

After his dismissal from the office of Chief of Army Command, Seeckt expressed his views in his book *Thoughts of a Soldier*, written in his characteristically brilliant style. There he asks: “Must, if military conflicts are unavoidable, whole peoples hurl themselves against one another every time? The soldier must ask himself whether these giant armies can still be led at all in the sense of decision-seeking strategy, and whether every war between these masses must not again freeze. Perhaps the principle of the mass army (...) has already overshot itself today; the *fureur de nombre* is at an end. The mass becomes immobile; it can no longer maneuver, thus cannot win; it can only crush.” Concerning armament he writes: “The smaller an army is, the easier it will be to arm it in modern fashion, while the permanent maintenance of modern armament for armies of millions becomes an impossibility.”

Seeckt’s biographer Friedrich von Rabenau was one of the greatest supporters of the Seecktian conception. As late as 1935 he wrote a military-historical-tactical book in which he examined a series of important battles in which numerically inferior German forces decisively defeated enemy armies through the application of tactical movement. The Battle of Tannenberg, 1914, was Rabenau’s most important example for showing the force of the smaller, modern army that faced an immobile mass army. Seeckt’s construction allowed its advocates a renaissance of classical operational warfare, which had gone under in the battles of matériel of the World War. Beyond that, it offered the advantage of at least temporarily evading two cardinal problems of modern warfare: the question of the motivation of

the whole population for war was not a pressing problem for its decisive first phase thanks to the available operational army. The same was true of the conversion of industry to the conditions of a rigorous war economy. Seeckt scarcely occupied himself with these questions, since he opposed any relativization of armed war and remained attached to traditional doctrines.

Blomberg's belief in the force of a people's army lay, as has already become clear, at the other end of the intellectual-military spectrum. In his study of the military-theoretical writings of J. F. C. Fuller and Basil Liddell Hart, he had dealt with the possibilities offered by an elite army, and found Seeckt's idea of the "aristocratic army as the best form of defense (...) also very worthy of attention"; nevertheless, belief in the effectiveness of a people's army belonged to the foundation of his military thought. On the whole, like the French, he was influenced by his experiences on the Western Front with large masses, whereas Seeckt's horizon had been widened by his experiences in the East and Southeast. Trusting in the theory of his teacher Reinhardt — "And all those are wrong who believe that one can ever have too many good soldiers" — Blomberg's answer to the question "high technical quality of the army or use of the strongest possible masses in the fighting front" was: high technical quality of the army and use of the strongest possible masses. Shaped by the ideas of the Psychological School, for him the troop mass was not to blame for the failures of the year 1914, but rather the intellectual inability to form and lead it correctly. Seeckt's conviction of an elite army stood for him "entirely against the trend of the age, which now moves toward a concentration of the masses, whether politically or militarily." In corpore, Blomberg's solution therefore consisted in a return to Schlieffen's mass armies, technically perfected and prepared by a Field Commander Psychologos, which were to win victory. In this respect he remained faithful to the Prussian tradition, while Seeckt's conception of an elite army paradoxically represented precisely a break with the Schlieffen tradition. In one point Blomberg's views moved in step with Seeckt's: he too wanted to create a military elite and apply the "Guard principle," as it had been shaped by Napoleon I, to the conditions of the Reich army. Within the future army of millions, qualitatively especially high-ranking units were to be created, which were to function as the "school of the nation." Even if the National Socialist answer to the question elite army or mass army coincided with Blomberg's ideas, he complains in his memoirs that he "had to fight against Seeckt's inheritance in the army even after the seizure of power by the National Socialists," when "a part of the Reichswehr made difficulties and showed little understanding for the building of the German people's army and for its motorization."

CHIEF OF THE TRUPPENAMT (1927–1929)

On 27 September 1926 a southern German local newspaper brought the news that the elder son of the Crown Prince, Prince Wilhelm, had taken part in exercises of Potsdam Infantry Regiment 9 in uniform; the regiment continued the tradition of the Prussian Guard. A week later the same report appeared in the Berlin press and triggered a wave of indignation against Seeckt. In this so-called "Princes' Affair" he had once again proved that he held fast to the dream-fantasies of his past; his resignation as Chief of Army Command could no longer be prevented. Misjudging the political explosiveness of the "Princes' Affair," Blomberg sought the cause of Seeckt's fall in an intrigue by Schleicher, who — according to Blomberg's retrospective analysis of the events — had wanted, like Seeckt, to be "the first," "even if under full camouflage."

A few days before, Blomberg had returned from an inspection journey from Budapest and had stopped in Vienna. As he crossed a street absent-mindedly, he was hit by a car. The accident had serious health consequences and put Blomberg out of action for many weeks. What had happened? On the afternoon of the third day of his stay in Vienna, Blomberg wandered along Mariahilferstraße in search of a

bookstore: “In the evening we wanted to depart for Berlin. Lost in thought I wanted to cross the road; I did not pay attention to the ‘right-hand driving of vehicles’ prescribed in Austria and was now, through my fault, run over by a motor cab. Of the accident itself I know nothing. I remember very indistinctly (...)” Blomberg’s left leg was literally shattered below the knee, his right forearm broken, the left wrist sprained. The most serious injury was the break of the leg, which almost had to be amputated. Many officers later wanted, incidentally, to see one cause of Blomberg’s “peculiarities” in this accident.

Thus it came about that Blomberg learned of the Princes’ Affair and its consequences in a Viennese hospital. He knew that it meant the end of the Seeckt era and thus a caesura in the history of the Reichswehr, and he now hoped for the appointment of his military foster-father Reinhardt as the new Chief of Army Command. Reinhardt, however, was passed over in the order of succession, which Blomberg interpreted as an intrigue by Seeckt, who had not wanted to see Reinhardt as his successor. The new Chief of Army Command became, on 8 October 1926, General Wilhelm Heye — “Papa Heye,” as he was called, since he was considered weak and too mild and “let the lieutenants dance on his nose.” Blomberg probably saw in Heye a suitable successor to the difficult Seeckt precisely for that reason, for “it turned out,” he recalls, “that Heye in many respects possessed just those qualities that were favorable for a forward development of the Reichswehr. (...) General Heye shared the view of us younger men about the necessary development of the Reichswehr into a Führerheer and was receptive to the ideas and proposals of his collaborators, to whom he left wide scope.” Thus from then on military policy began to move on other paths and in other tracks.

The experience in Vienna made Blomberg believe in fate: “As a deep incision, the accident in Vienna had overtaken me. I felt with solemnity that death had brushed me. After that I was much more confident (...). I was convinced that much still lay before me.”

And indeed: after his return from Vienna, Blomberg was appointed Chief of the Truppenamt on 1 April 1927. He was thereby representative of the Chief of Army Command in all matters of his sphere of business, but possessed no command authority of his own. On the same day his preferred promotion to major general took place. The simultaneous promotions of Schleicher, Stülpnagel — Chief of the Army Personnel Office existing since 1920 — and von dem Bussche to major generals were likewise unusual and preferential.

The new task made him de facto chief of the secret Great General Staff of the Weimar Republic and equipped him with a fullness of power previously unknown to him, which now enabled him to prepare the way for the implementation of reform ideas in the army. His new field of duties included the promotion and supervision of the training of General Staff officers, the filling of General Staff positions and the schooling of officers, as well as the leadership of a General Staff journey, which took place on a large scale in summer, and of a war game in winter. In these, tactical planning problems and questions of border and national defense were posed and examined. The preparations for these war games forced the Chief of the Truppenamt to occupy himself in detail with the compilation of the materials necessary for the tactical evaluation of the tasks.

The major general began his assumption of office with a reorganization of the individual sections and offices of the Truppenamt. This went hand in hand with a “policy of rejuvenation” coordinated with the Personnel Office under Stülpnagel. With the now completed “seizure of power” by the younger men — Blomberg, Stülpnagel, von dem Bussche, Schleicher, and Heye — in Bendlerstraße, the tide had finally turned against the old generation of officers and the Schlieffen fanatics in the Reichswehr Ministry, who now left in large waves down to 1931–32. Blomberg’s predecessor, Major General Wetzell, disapprovingly sensed the new wind that began to blow under Blomberg in the Truppenamt and

informed Seeckt: “Your Excellency’s successor [Heye, the author notes] wanted to surround himself with new, younger, as he told me ‘softer’ personalities! He believed that cooperation with the new personnel chief Colonel von Stülpnagel would be difficult for me (...). A new course is now being taken everywhere here; I can only sincerely wish that it brings benefit to army and Fatherland. I am, however, skeptical, not only on the basis of what I have personally experienced.”

In fact, under the new personnel conditions, several things changed in the Reichswehr Ministry. While the Seeckt years had been determined primarily by personnel and organizational armament questions, and the Reich army remained essentially at the weapons-technical standard of the year 1918, under the changed conditions the armaments problem now became the actual motor of Reichswehr policy. Blomberg and other politically oriented officers of modern stamp now had, because of their possibilities of influence, the opportunity to create an effective and well-equipped army on the basis of the inner stability and efficiency of the Reichswehr established by Seeckt. As the new Chief of the Truppenamt, Blomberg turned with great zeal to the implementation of the tactical change of direction into military-political reality. He intensified the preparations for border and national defense in the East and pursued theoretical and practical preparations for mobilization. In doing so, narrow limits were set for Blomberg and his collaborators in the Truppenamt both by the Versailles provisions and by the reservations of the German civilian authorities.

Blomberg, who wanted to force through the transformation of the Reichswehr into a cadre army in order one day to be able to wage the war of liberation anticipated by Stülpnagel with the most modern weapons, writes in his memoirs: “In the Weapons Office the preconditions for a later modern armament were promoted with great emphasis.” The plans running in first beginnings since the end of 1925 for the limitedly deployable twenty-one-division army also entered a concrete stage around the middle of 1927. On 30 June the Organizational Department, T2, of the Truppenamt submitted the draft of an A[u]fstellungs-Plan, a deployment or formation plan for a wartime armed force. In view of the limited means, Blomberg set an intermediate goal in February 1928. According to this, the provision of material equipment for the A-Army was to take place in two stages. As the first stage, to be reached by the end of 1932, a sixteen-division army was aimed at, with seven divisions to be equipped with modern equipment. In a second step, in a further five years by 1938, the complete material framework for the twenty-one divisions of the A-Army was then to be created. This order was reflected in the so-called first armament program of the Reichswehr, which was approved by General Heye on 29 September 1928.

Blomberg belonged to those representatives of the General Staff who pressed for stronger use of technical development for the Reichswehr. His “unusual interest” in new weapons and tactics had long since earned him the reputation of a “modernist.” As Chief of the Army Training Department he had proved in conflict with Seeckt that he believed more in the strength of new weapons than in the utility of an orthodox strategy. He saw one essential and unintended result of the disarmament forced upon Germany by the Versailles Treaty in the fact that the country was freed from the ballast of the weapons of the last war. For him, who wanted to “clear away thoroughly outdated institutions and thoughts,” the military tabula rasa seemed ideally suited for a new beginning with technically highly developed weapons. The general believed that a future war would stand under the sign of the motor, and he belonged to the earliest supporters of the armored arm. In the overviews of currently valid regulations, orders, and noteworthy writings on special fields, drawn up annually by the individual offices of the Truppenamt in the Blomberg era, special weight was laid on writings about the technical further development of tanks and aircraft. These orders served primarily as a “basis for the military-scientific further education of soldiers.”

The English maneuvers of 1926 had made Blomberg familiar with the advantages of the new, highly mobile Vickers tanks Mark I A and had revealed to him the operational possibilities of the tank arm. He emphatically supported the completion of the plans for the construction of a light tank in 1928 and the later establishment of the first three panzer divisions in autumn 1934. He had also dealt thoroughly with the foreign military specialist literature on warfare with tanks, above all with the publications of Basil Liddell Hart and J. F. C. Fuller, who probably belonged to the most important military writers between the two wars and had considerably enlivened military discussion in the 1920s throughout Europe. They were determined advocates of motorization and technologization of modern armies, wanted to increase their striking power, and bring about quick military decisions.

Tank dummies used by the Reichswehr for exercise purposes, such as Dixi small cars and other imperfect fighting-vehicle imitations, could not — this had become very clear not only to the Chief of the Truppenamt in the past training cycles — represent the technical and tactical characteristics of “real” tanks. Even extensive writings serving the theoretical occupation with this weapon did not prevent the military men from seeing that there was no longer any way around gaining practical experience with the tank arm if the German army was not to become, as it were, militarily provincial. The same was naturally true of the airplane. Only in foreign armies could German officers study the weapons denied to them. Participation in maneuver exercises of other armies was therefore of decisive importance. When the aviation agreement of May 1926 eased the restrictions imposed on German civil aviation and conceded to the Reichswehr the right to organize anti-aircraft defense from the ground and to conduct theoretical aviation studies abroad, Blomberg traveled in 1927 with a group of fourteen army officers to Hendon, a suburb of London, in order to attend demonstrations of the Royal Air Force. These days of the air force — the Hendon Air Display — had taken place annually since 1920. They conveyed a picture of the performance of the English flying force, allowed judgment of flying and military training as well as the technical standard, and made possible comparison with the air forces of other states. The Air Display showed that the flying and military training of the British air forces stood at a level that could not be reached by the air forces of other states.

Blomberg drove forward the formation of an officer corps of the flying arm, which became the origin of the later Luftwaffe. The general had recognized that in future one would no longer be able to operate purely continentally. “We took,” he describes the secret efforts of the Truppenamt, “the formation of an officer corps of the flying arm in hand. We had to begin in a very small framework (...) and had suitable young men, before they entered the army as officer cadets, trained as fliers at sports schools that we supported. Later they were furloughed annually for refresher courses. This institution proved itself very well.” Beyond this, Blomberg promoted the expansion of the flying school at Lipetsk, Russia, of which more will be said. In the Third Reich too he was to continue to exercise decisive influence on the development of the Luftwaffe. One cannot regard him as an air-force theorist, but his views of the future role of the Luftwaffe within the Wehrmacht coincided with the most important theses of German air-power thinking in the mid-1930s.

Shortly after his appointment as Reichswehr Minister, he had the Reich Commissariat for Aviation combined with the Air-Protection Office of the Reichswehr Ministry to form the Reich Air Ministry. He thereby created the institutional basis for the development of the Luftwaffe as an independent branch of the armed forces and ensured its preferential treatment in the allocation of personnel and raw materials. It is an irony of history that precisely Göring, who played a central role in Blomberg’s fall in 1938, profited most from his work. According to Blomberg’s ideas, the new part of the Wehrmacht was to become an “elite corps with stormy offensive spirit.” His own son Axel, who had originally been a cavalryman, was to go to the Luftwaffe and die in an airplane in the Second World War; the elder, Henning, in a tank.

THE SPECIAL GROUP R[USSIA]

The Chief of the Truppenamt was also responsible for the so-called Special Group R[ussia]. Seeckt had called it into being at the beginning of the year 1921. The Special Group had the task of examining possibilities and practical advantages that might arise from close cooperation between the Red Army and the Reichswehr. From November 1922 the Truppenamt possessed sole responsibility for the Russian relations of the Reich army, and the whole coordinating work ran under the aegis of the Chief of the Truppenamt, who was also responsible for the armaments-economic plans and the German training centers in Russia. Soon a lively exchange of officers and generals had developed at the operational level. It found expression in regular inspection journeys, troop and maneuver visits by the German Chiefs of the Truppenamt in Russia, just as in the participation of many Soviet officers in the secret General Staff training of the Reichswehr Ministry.

The original idea of military cooperation between the Soviet Union and the German Reich, which was initiated in the year 1920 with the first secret conversational contacts between the Army Command and emissaries of Moscow, aimed at transferring German armaments industry lying idle because of the Versailles restrictions to Russia. Far from Allied military control, the Soviet state was to become the Reich's production and weapons arsenal. The cooperation with the Red Army sought by the Reichswehr concentrated on the development of the production of weapons forbidden to the Reich by the Treaty of Versailles, such as aircraft, tanks, and chemical weapons. It was also the concern of the Reichswehr leadership to equip the Red Army within the framework of its funds for a possible struggle against the common main enemy, Poland. As compensation the Soviet Union expected financial assistance for the construction of its armaments industry and the training of Russian General Staff officers in Germany.

In November 1949 the American Time Magazine gave the following summary, but entirely apt, assessment of the cooperation between Reichswehr and Red Army: "Germany had needed arms and space to train; Russia know-how. Both had got what they wanted."

German training and testing stations on Russian soil formed the backbone of the military-technical and tactical cooperation between Reichswehr and Red Army. In 1925 a flying school was opened in Lipetsk, and at the end of 1926 a tank school in Kazan on the middle Volga. The tank school represented an especially successful example of German-Soviet military cooperation, from which the Soviet side likewise profited to a high degree. Since 1928 there also existed a scientific testing and research ground for chemical warfare agents of the Reich army near the Volga town of Volsk, Tomka.

As leader of Special Group R, Blomberg was a constant guest in Wilhelmstraße, where the task was to extract concessions from the diplomats of the Foreign Office with regard to the Reich army's training centers located in Russia and to advocate the intensification of military relations between Soviet Russia and Germany. Blomberg knew how to use skillfully the advantages that the training of Russian officers brought to the Truppenamt. When in the second half of 1927 the KPD fiercely attacked the Reichswehr in the Reichstag, he had several Russian officers come and explained to them that, in view of the KPD attacks, he could not guarantee that he could advocate their remaining in Germany. If, however, they were in a position to bring the Communist attacks in parliament to silence, then nothing would stand in the way of their further presence. The assurance of the Russian officers that the KPD would direct no more attacks against the Reichswehr in parliament the next day was fulfilled in full.

Blomberg, who soon in internal Soviet evaluations was described as a “friend of the Red Army,” saw in the instruction of their commanders in the training methods of the Reich army demanded by the Russians a justified counter-gift for the opportunities for activity that had been granted to the German army by the Russians for its schools. The strengthening of the Russian army connected with this lay, he judged, in the German interest. He considered the cooperation of the two armies necessary. It would have a result favorable for both sides if it succeeded in “excluding from the common work the inner-political oppositions lying rooted in the different state systems.”

Blomberg’s pro-Russian orientation was politically motivated and directed against Poland and France. Beyond this, under the premise that “in Russia the Red Army had moved furthest away from its revolutionary origin,” and in memory of the tradition of Tauroggen, he believed that he could find new models in the national-defense organization of the Soviet Union for the mobilization of his own people.

As for the alliance value of Soviet Russia, not all General Staff officers of the army were as optimistic as Blomberg. A fierce controversy developed over this between him and the Chief of the Army Department, T1, Hermann Geyer, since Geyer, unlike Blomberg, could not overlook the ideological oppositions between Russia and Germany. He regarded Russia as “not a healthy organism so long as no other orientation appeared there politically and economically.”

After Otto Hasse’s stay in Russia in 1923, it was Blomberg who in summer 1928 undertook the second visit of a Chief of the Truppenamt to the Soviet Union. During his Russia journey he had close contacts with the leading generals of the Red Army: the Chief of the General Staff Boris Shaposhnikov; his predecessor Mikhail Tukhachevsky; the chief of the air fleet, Petr Baranov; the generals Blücher, Commander-in-Chief of Ukraine, Yakir, and Petr Uborevich, whom he counted among his friends.

Following an invitation from Soviet War Commissar Kliment Voroshilov, and provided with the task of strengthening the Reichswehr’s contacts with the higher ranks of the Soviet army and assessing the striking power of the Red Army, he traveled in mid-August 1928 with his adjutant Captain Kurt Gallenkamp, Wehramt chief Erich von dem Bussche-Ippenburg, and Lieutenant Colonel Ernst Köstring, the secret German military attaché in Russia, via Riga and the Latvian-Russian border station Bigosovo first to Moscow. There the inspection of military installations as well as discussions with Voroshilov and his Chief of the General Staff Shaposhnikov were on the program. Voroshilov made a very good impression on Blomberg, since he seemed striving “to lead the army out of bondage to Party doctrine and to make the soldier into a national-Russian defender of the Fatherland.” Shaposhnikov struck Blomberg by the fact that he understood how “to preserve Stalin’s favor and trust.” Overall Blomberg was very satisfied with his reception by the Russian officers, for “the Russians [...] showed the most extensive accommodation during the whole journey.” War Commissar Voroshilov had given instructions to show everything and fulfill all wishes of the visitors. Organization and state of training were thus presented “without reservation and openly,” and the officers around General Blomberg were able to gain a complete insight.

Accompanied by Oskar Ritter von Niedermayer, head of the Moscow Central Office, which in a certain sense represented the Soviet branch office of T3, and by the previous Soviet military attaché in Berlin, Lunev, they traveled from Moscow in their own salon car eastward toward Nizhny Novgorod, Gorky; from there on a Volga steamer downstream to Kazan, where the tank school Kama and a Russian summer training camp were inspected. Blomberg established: “The expansion of the facility is nearly completed; the terrain offers in the near and wider surroundings (...) very favorable training possibilities.”

The provision of tanks of German production was a chief problem and had so far prevented the beginning of regular school operations in Kazan. Voroshilov made serious reproaches to Blomberg and emphatically pointed to the difficulties arising for him with his government because of the delayed beginning of the work in Kazan. Blomberg, who thanked him for the great organizational support in setting up the facility, promised the Soviet War Commissar the transport of the first tanks for the coming spring.

The attitude of the tank specialists in the Reichswehr Ministry toward the testing work in Russia was by no means uniform. At the same time as Blomberg gave Voroshilov the promise for 1929, the head of the tank section, Testing 6, in the Army Weapons Office, Lieutenant Colonel Gaißert, expressly advised his office chief, Lieutenant General Ludwig, against it at the beginning of September 1928. Alongside the numerous personnel and technical problems caused by the long lines of communication, the transfer of German tanks into the Soviet Union seemed to him “burdened with many dangers of an internal- as well as external-political nature, which wanted careful consideration.”

In fact, in the same year, 1928, the plans for the construction of a light tank had been completed, and industrial firms such as Krupp and Rheinmetall had been commissioned to build two of these tanks each, which they then also carried out over the course of the following two years. In January 1930 the first light tank from Krupp was demonstrated in Meppen to the officers of the Army Weapons Office. The firm was able to promise delivery of the first completely finished tank for April and of the second, intended for Russia, for May 1930.

Via Samara the ship journey led the German officers — with an intermediate stay in Lenin’s birthplace, Ulyanovsk — past the Volga German settlement colonies to Saratov, where not far from Volsk the gas training ground Tomka was visited. At the beginning of February 1928 Stresemann had yielded to the pressure of Blomberg and Groener and had agreed to participation in scientific gas experiments on Russian soil. The work of building the testing station for laboratory and field experiments had begun immediately, so that Blomberg could judge the facility “very well organized” and the personnel “very usable.”

After the end of the six-day ship journey in Tomka there followed a visit to the spa town Lipetsk in central Russia. The flying school founded here in 1925 on a factory site was by far the largest facility of the Reichswehr in Russia. Only a few months earlier, in a tug-of-war lasting months with the politicians of the Foreign Office, Blomberg had obtained a considerable increase in the number of flying students to be sent to Lipetsk. The secret training programs for fighter pilots and observers had begun with fifty Fokker D.XIII machines purchased in Holland. Blomberg, who celebrated his fiftieth birthday on the troop training ground, was present at a joint maneuver of a German artillery-flying squadron and a Soviet battery.

From Lipetsk the inspection journey led the Chief of the Truppenamt into the Belorussian Military District for air maneuvers in the Gomel area. The two-day large-scale exercise in border-adjacent airspace rehearsed, with about 250 machines employed, the smashing of an enemy deployment from the air — and according to Blomberg showed “impressive flying and tactical achievements.”

In Kiev the German officers attended a one-week maneuver exercise of the Red Army. “The war situations,” according to Blomberg’s impression, “betrayed almost throughout a conception of operational and tactical principles that coincides with ours.” At the same time, “the Red Army was essentially more skillful in defense and retreat than in attack.”

During the maneuvers the Chief of the Truppenamt recognized how important the improvement of its staff service was for the Red Army, since troop leadership showed considerable deficiencies: "The activity of the higher command suffered greatly from the deficient organization of the staffs. Commander and chief of staff frequently separated and issued orders independently of one another at different places on the battlefield. [...] The evaluation of enemy reports and the whole issuing of orders proceeds more slowly than with us." Blomberg judged that "expansiveness instead of brevity and precision, with a generally little-developed order technique, hindered effective staff work." Attempts to remedy this point were, however, recognizable. Blomberg observed "order exercises in the staffs according to our model," which allowed one to expect gradual improvement of command technique.

It was therefore no wonder that Voroshilov sought an expansion of the previous General Staff commands and asked the German Chief of the Truppenamt to be allowed to send five officers "for a longer time" to the General Staff courses in Berlin. In questions of officer training too, Blomberg judged, people were "working with zeal and success to transfer German training principles to the conditions of the Red Army." "The leadership," he noted, "finds itself in relation to us in the conscious condition of the pupil. Knowledge of German military literature and of German regulations is often surprising. To have studied the German principles in practice counts as a personal advantage, and a command to the Reichswehr as especially desirable."

The discussion of the "Polish question" was exceedingly important for the generals of the Red Army. Voroshilov assured Blomberg "that in the event of a Polish attack on Germany, Russia would be ready for every assistance," in order to be able to pose the "decisive question for the Soviet Union," whether "in the event of a Polish attack the Red Army could also count on Germany's support." Blomberg answered the War Commissar that "this was a matter of grand politics, for which the political offices alone were responsible." His emphatic restraint shown here in political questions deviated sharply from the behavior of Seeckt, and also of General Hasse, five years earlier.

A two-day stay in Leningrad ended Blomberg's almost four-week journey to Russia in mid-September. After his return he had a detailed inspection report prepared, which openly presented the organization, armament, and state of training of the Red Army in the late 1920s. Beyond that, his analysis reflects the state of German exercises in the fields of weapons, gas and air warfare, as well as his appreciation of the military relations with the Red Army. Blomberg summarized: "The undertakings in Russia — flying school, tank school, gas experiments — stand on entirely healthy foundations. The possibility of continuing to operate these institutions, vital for our armament, must be preserved (...). The rising Red Army is a factor with which one must reckon. To have it as a friend can only be of advantage. [...]"

The Reichswehr, he further reflected, could learn valuable things from the Red Army in various fields. Alongside equipment and exchange of devices for the troops, engineer service, and chemical weapons, he described "the exemplary propaganda activity of the Red Army, the organization of air defense for the population, and the drawing-in of the same for national defense" as especially exemplary for the Reichswehr.

Although the journey to Russia was only one of several inspection journeys abroad that Blomberg undertook in his career, it made an especially deep and lasting impression on him. Looking back he writes: "Outwardly, the Red Army was already then a strong protection of the country. It trusted in the inexhaustible number and the giant space of the unopened landscape. At that time it seemed as if an invading enemy who based his art of war on technology would get stuck. So that at that time I assessed a military action against Russia (...) as improbable." In a certain respect he was to remain with this assessment until 1938.

Blomberg saw and found in Russia what corresponded to his own military goals. Above all, he was impressed by what he took to be an omnipresent spirit of unity and of the national idea within the army. Even more than the immense breadth of Russian space, the relationship of the army to the masses fascinated him. Since the Russians with different socioeconomic backgrounds passed through the individual stations of the army in order to be “educated,” the army functioned here, as he saw it, as the “school of the nation,” as the Prussian army reformers had once intended. Blomberg was overwhelmed by the possibilities of a socially fully integrated military, borne by the pride, enthusiasm, and readiness for sacrifice of an entire society.

That fit into the American postwar image of the last War Minister of the German Reich. In 1949 an American illustrated magazine contained the description of the following scene: “In November 1934, at the Soviet embassy in Berlin, Hitler’s War Minister Werner von Blomberg raised a glass of sparkling Crimean wine in a toast: ‘Never shall we forget what the Soviet army did for Germany. I drink to the well-being and to the future of the great and glorious Soviet army, to faithful comradeship in arms, today and in the future.’”

At this point one should recall once more the already cited politician Hermann Rauschning. In London exile in 1942 he brought Blomberg’s turn toward National Socialism into direct connection with his Russian travel experiences of 1928. He was not the only one to do so, and in fact Blomberg himself during the war did not depart from his lifelong pro-Russian orientation, with which he remained entirely in the Reichswehr tradition. Still in Nuremberg detention in 1945 he noted: “It seems to me that my old thesis is correct, according to which the Russians stand closer to us than the West.”

THE STUDY OF THE U.S. ARMY (1930)

In view of the war-decisive confrontations between the two military powers Germany and the United States in the First and Second World Wars, the military contacts between the German and the American army in the interwar phase deserve some interest.

Blomberg’s visit to the U.S. Army took place only one year after his fall as Chief of the Truppenamt, in the year 1930. Nevertheless, his journey is to be sketched already at this point and compared with his journey to the USSR. His travel impressions, likewise summarized in an inspection report, allow conclusions about his military-political thinking, especially in comparison with his Russian travel impressions.

Blomberg’s stay with the U.S. Army occurred at the suggestion of the military attaché Colonel John Carpenter, as a return visit for the visit of Major General William Connor, head of the Army War College, in summer 1929. Reichswehr Minister Groener at first wanted to prevent Blomberg’s assignment to the USA, but had to give way to Heye, who was considered the decisive promoter of military relations between the Reichswehr and the U.S. Army. Heye saw in Blomberg, as former Chief of the Army Training Department and of the Truppenamt, the suitable general for this inspection journey, since the assessment of the school system of the American army was also on the program.

The foundations for this first official command of higher German officers to the Army of the United States had been created in 1921 by Department T3, Foreign Armies, of the Truppenamt after the withdrawal of the American Expeditionary Forces from Germany, by taking up again the old line of Groener’s special policy with Colonel Arthur Conger from the year 1919. Major Boetticher, with an

extensive U.S. visit in 1923, initiated a series of official and semi-official visits by Reichswehr officers to the United States. In the second half of the 1920s the Reichswehr had developed a lively travel diplomacy across the Atlantic on the basis of careful agreements with the American military attaché, the ambassador, the War Department, and the Foreign Office. By 1930, alongside the Soviet Union, the United States had become the most popular travel destination for Reichswehr officers. The German army had intensified military relations with the United States with the aim of undermining the international isolation created by the Versailles Treaty through unofficial contacts. Alongside this military-political motive of maintaining contacts stood the Reichswehr's military-technical interest. While the Soviet Union offered exercise ground, the U.S. Army supplied organizational and military-technical knowledge. The USA offered the possibility of following on the spot the development of forbidden weapons, chemical warfare, motorization, and tank development at the latest technical level, and of using the knowledge gained for one's own planning for "the time after Versailles." At the center of German interest stood the development of the American air force. In addition, the Reichswehr wanted to gain insight into the American mobilization system and into the propaganda activity of the American army. The organization of the National Guard, the R.O.T.C., and the organized reserves also belonged to the central points of interest. On the other side, the Reichswehr granted the American military attachés in Germany insight into military armament, and the War Department thereby belonged, alongside the Red Army in 1927–28, to the best-informed offices regarding German armament.

On 25 September 1930 Blomberg embarked for America in the company of the chief of Department T3, Foreign Armies, Colonel Erich Kühlenthal. During their two-month inspection journey they crossed the country and completed an extensive visiting program of military installations and commanding generals. Despite some faux pas, the journey was such a success that it was expressly welcomed by the German ambassador in Washington, Friedrich von Prittwitz.

The official part of the journey began in Washington. After a detailed introduction of all decisive persons and generals, the Chief of Staff Charles Summerall assigned to Blomberg Colonel Walter Krueger, instructor at the Naval War College, as accompanying officer as far as San Francisco. The journey across the continent began on 5 October with a visit organized by the War Department to the "water-mark" of the American Civil War, the battlefields of Gettysburg. This was followed by the visit to the Army War College, a military university oriented toward research for an elite of the General Staff, at which the assigned General Staff officers worked primarily on questions of tactics and strategy as well as psychological influence. Blomberg was linked by friendship with the director of the War College, General Connor, which had its roots in an earlier visit by Connor to the Reichswehr. Blomberg valued the general because he was "an opponent of every frozen doctrine" and "pressed forward without losing himself in fantasies." The journey in a salon car went from Columbus and Atlanta via San Antonio, Texas, and El Paso to San Francisco. Blomberg's military interest in this lay in the inspection of various flying, tank, and infantry schools. The flying school near San Antonio left on him an excellent impression. The stay in San Francisco served especially the study of the military installations of the two universities Berkeley and Stanford. The trip continued to the General Staff School at Leavenworth, Kansas. Despite the considerable defects that Blomberg thought he could determine here, he recommended that in future a General Staff officer of the Reich army be sent to Leavenworth, since there he could "grasp the leadership principles of the French army in an indirect way." There followed a stay at the field artillery school Fort Sill near Oklahoma. After that the German officers in Chicago conducted a several-hour discussion with Commanding General Parker. In Chicago Blomberg visited his old friend and war comrade Hugo Ferdinand Simon, who from 1920 to 1922 had been Rathenau's personal adviser in the Foreign Office and was now consul general in Chicago. Simon gave a dinner in Blomberg's honor, in which the military elite of the city took part. The last stage of the

journey led via Pittsburgh to New York, where inspection of the Naval War College at Newport and the military academy West Point were on the program. From New York the return journey to Europe was begun.

In his inspection report, beside an assessment of the organization of the American army — with a view to the conditions of the Reich army — Blomberg devoted himself above all to the evaluation of the military school system in the United States. He notes: “The inspection of the military institutions” had made visible “a rigid holding fast to outdated methods.” He attests to West Point: “The school is still entirely eighteenth century (...) training to become a modern soldier in applied tactics and in troop life does not take place.” Kuhlenthal seconded him in his detailed report on the journey: “Everything frighteningly antediluvian! If old Steuben rose today and saw again the school that sprang from his thoughts, he would say: ‘Behold, nothing has changed.’”

Blomberg also estimated very low the value of the National Guard, militias of the federal states, which he came to know through the example of a New York regiment. Although the trainees were “receptive masses,” he stated that here too the tendency toward “traditions and romanticism” prevailing in the training camps and arsenals prevented “war-appropriate training into modern soldiers.” Cum grano salis, “holding fast to traditions (...) was the Achilles’ heel of the whole system.” Blomberg came to the conclusion logical for him that “the highly developed school system of the American army [was] not usable for the German Reich army,” also because “it presupposed a surplus of officers and a high money budget.” He judged “the results of training in the Reichswehr, without such a broadly arranged school system, to be considerably higher,” and found that training front officers in and through the troops was preferable to the American example. Only the War College found his recognition: “We lack an institution in which outstanding General Staff officers are brought together for one year for study and research and, in pursuit of the intellectual penetration and fixation of modern problems, assigned for treatment by the Chief of Army Command, deepen their training as higher assistants to command. We possess the beginnings of this institution in the so-called Reinhardt School, with the staff of Group Command 1. I propose making the attempt to transform this school, through corresponding setting of aims and personnel equipment (...), in the sense of the American War College.”

Despite all the defects he identified, Blomberg recognized the value of exchange commands and reciprocal visits. Although “the organizational condition of the American army and its effects on purely professional ability restrict the yield of our study in some respects,” he summarizes his impression, “nevertheless it presses itself clearly upon one what, so to speak incidentally, is offered by way of instruction and experience: the broadening of judgment and experience that every foreign visit includes; the weapons forbidden to us, especially the excellent aviation; the work devoted to preparation for the great war — National Guard, organized reserves, industrial mobilization.” If “for Germany there exists the need or probably the necessity of coming into a friendly relationship with the United States,” then Blomberg thought “the cultivation of personal relations with the American army” was “an especially good means, among many others.”

In Blomberg’s inspection report, as in his memoirs, it becomes clear that, precisely in comparison with the impressions gathered in the Soviet Union, he remains rather cool and reserved in his judgment of the U.S. Army and its alliance value for Germany. He also apparently did not feel the same affinity for the Americans as for the Russians. This may have lain in the Americans’ tendency toward “traditions and romanticism.” Only one of Blomberg’s leitmotifs is found again and again in his thoughts on the United States: the question of the military and political mass. In the interwar period, a consumer society with new forms of mass entertainment had arisen in the United States for the first time, so that the Americans were perceived precisely in these years as a people of the mass. While Blomberg’s travel

companion Erich Kühnenthal, in his very detailed report on the U.S. journey, did not deal with the old familiar phenomenon, Blomberg asked himself what, besides the great number of people, 130 million in 1930, were the causes for the “especially strong forces toward formation of a uniform type” in America. He came to the undoubtedly correct result that “dissolving into the mass” was probably grounded in the modernity of the USA. Alongside the spread of the motorcar, he saw in “daily influence through the press, through countless magazines, cinema, and radio” especially effective media “to filter the dignity of work, the ideal setting of the gentleman, and the romantic miracles of becoming rich into the consciousness and subconscious of the masses.” Abroad, Blomberg noted, one must not only take into account “the mass consciousness of the American people and its resulting steerability”; one could also learn here in military respects how much it lay in “the art of leadership” “to recognize the stirrings of the mass soul, to be able to estimate and understand its currents of will,” in order to be able to give it “the right slogan in war.”

The insights that Blomberg gained on his journey in the USA were in essential points identical with those that Hitler was to enforce after 1933: the necessity of setting up a technologically modernly equipped people’s army on the basis of a “widely stretched industrial mobilization,” and the dominant role of the air force — at the expense of the rest of the army — on the basis of a broadly developed aircraft industry.

THE LOSS OF REALITY:

THE CONCLUSIONS FROM THE TRUPPENAMT STUDIES 1928/29

During Blomberg’s period of service as Chief of the Truppenamt, the forcing forward of material and personnel rearmament, as it had begun after the end of the Seeckt era, could hardly be carried out, as before, off to one side. It required — as the then Chief of the Operations Department, Joachim von Stülpnagel, had already known in 1923 — the support and cooperation of the government, the economy, and the people. The endeavor of the new Army Command was to overcome the attitudes of political waiting cultivated in the Seeckt school and the military isolation created from them. Through new readiness for cooperation with the civilian offices, above all the Foreign Office, the requirements of modern military policy were to be satisfied and the political development of the Republic influenced in the sense desired by the Reichswehr leadership. Blomberg had recognized that, if the army wanted to arm, no withdrawal from politics and society was possible, and, following the military-political line of Reichswehr Minister Groener and his cardinal in politics Kurt von Schleicher, he cooperated intensively — though not always harmoniously — with the Foreign Office. The changed relationship between soldiers and diplomats showed itself in the war games of the Army Command in the winters of 1927/28 and 1928/29, and in the Truppenamt or exercise journeys to which Blomberg for the first time invited representatives of the Foreign Office. In the future too he considered “the participation of as many representatives of the Foreign Office as possible in further events of this kind very welcome.” In the Foreign Office people noticed with pleasant surprise the changed attitude within the Reichswehr leadership.

Precisely in the war games, foreign policy gained a weight as a factor of military operations that had been unknown in the prewar period. To a lengthy report on the Truppenamt journey of 1928 by the responsible delegation councillor in the Foreign Office, Dirk Förster, we owe an extremely noteworthy description of Blomberg’s decisive role for the beginning of a new time in the Truppenamt, for the beginning of the era of a “Young Army.”

Förster writes: “I attended an extensive reconnaissance journey through the County of Glatz and the

very long and detailed concluding lecture of the Chief of the Truppenamt, General von Blomberg. [...] The long automobile journey and the intimate social togetherness offered a favorable opportunity for detailed and fruitful personal discussions, especially with General von Blomberg and the responsible gentlemen of the Army Department, Colonel Freiherr von Fritsch, Colonel Muff, Major Wever, and others, as well as with the head of the Army Personnel Office, General von Stülpnagel, and the new head of the army-statistical department, Colonel Kühlenthal. [...] According to my overall impression it was first confirmed that the responsible gentlemen of the Truppenamt have the serious wish to keep in close contact with the Foreign Office [...]. Also pleasing is the sober assessment of our political and military-political situation [...]. This conscious 'turn away from romanticism' sounded through in many conversations. [...] On the whole I gained the impression that a new outlook is arising in the army. It is characteristic that the gentlemen appointed by Colonel General Heye to the responsible positions of the Truppenamt, all of whom are relatively young, feel themselves with a certain pride to be a 'young generation' [emphasis by the author]. [...] The decisive promoter of this development and the intellectual leader of the new army is apparently General von Blomberg, whose personal qualities and military abilities find high recognition throughout the whole officer corps [...]."

The troop-exercise journey to Silesia was the result of the operational planning of the Truppenamt. Before it, the operational war games of 1927/28 and 1928/29 had taken place. In them Blomberg proved that Joachim von Stülpnagel's operational postulates, as Stülpnagel had sketched them in lectures and in his memorandum on the future war in 1924, had not been nonbinding thought play for him. Rather, the general now systematically took up Stülpnagel's concept of a war of liberation in order to examine in detail the degree of its usefulness. In the form of test war games, the liberation struggle of Stülpnagel provenance was militarily channeled: all measures of secret rearmament, of both personnel and material kind, paramilitary warfare, including national fortification, demolition, evacuation, press, and propaganda, and finally also the military-political, foreign-political, and operational possibilities for a medium-term future were tested. In content, nothing changed in the basic conception, but in its assumptions it was reduced to what was militarily and administratively feasible.

The results of the two organizational war games, which are known in their military-political starting situations and in Blomberg's conclusions, though not in their course, were summarized by him at the beginning of 1929 in an extensive memorandum — the Conclusions from the Studies of the Truppenamt.

In the 1927/28 war game, Blomberg proceeded from the following assumption: "In the course of September of year X — where the year X can indeed be assumed arbitrarily, but insofar can be equated with the year 1927, as the presently given military balance of forces is to be taken as the basis — some negotiations conducted between Germany and Poland have hardened so much that [...] at the beginning of October it becomes apparent that the Polish government intends, without mobilization, to seize East Prussia and, in support of this action, to invade the remaining territory of the Reich. Accordingly Poland concentrates its [...] army in three groups, one of which is set up on the East Prussian border, the second in the Corridor, and the third southwest of Posen with the direction of attack against Breslau and Glogau. The vanguard is formed by irregular formations. The German government [...] decides on the defense of East Prussia. It must be added in supplementation that [...] this is a duel between Germany and Poland, in which one proceeds, for example, from the assumption that on the one hand our relations with France are so firmly secured that its intervention against us need not be reckoned with, while on the other hand Russia is so heavily occupied by internal political struggles that it represents no threat to Poland."

While the Truppenamt admitted that this was a situation that could be regarded as "militarily

exceptionally favorable,” the Foreign Office was fully conscious of the irrationality of the situation assumed in the war game. Schubert angrily noted: “Furthermore, it is apparently assumed that England fell victim to a seaquake and America partly to hurricanes, partly to false speculations and was ruined, while Czechoslovakia was completely occupied with the conclusion of concordat negotiations [...]”

The winter study of 1928/29 treated, on the basis of the desired armament level of 1 April 1933, a two-front war against Poland and France. As its assumption the Truppenamt laid down the following situation: “France wanted to compel by force of arms the transit, rightly refused by Germany, of French troops through Germany in order to support Poland in the struggle against Russia. [...] France initially committed the *armée de couverture*; Poland was essentially tied down in the East; the other powers held back.”

As the result of the first war situation, Blomberg summarized that the Reichswehr, “according to the armament level of 1 October 1927, even against Poland alone, if Poland has its hands free against Germany and is not tied down elsewhere, can offer reasonably promising resistance only for a short time and only under loss of further German territories.” The second war game also brought the crushing result that “not decision-seeking battles — but only delay of the enemy advance and weakening of it” could initially be the aim of military action. Every military conflict meant, for the foreseeable future, a military catastrophe for Germany. Already in a defensive war against Poland, and all the more in a war against France, defeat threatened.

As soon as Blomberg’s theoretical reflections for the winter war games — in which the deviations between the real political and military situation and the one being played were still reduced to a minimum — were used in a practical exercise, both political and military realism had to be sacrificed in order to be able to conduct an exercise at all. On the Truppenamt journey in Silesia, which followed directly on the first operational war game, and still more during the great autumn maneuvers, one could no longer speak of a reduction of the deviations described above, for what mattered to Blomberg was finding a — even if only theoretical — basis for the presentation of major war actions, for which a certain balance of the fighting forces was needed.

While Dirk Förster praised the Truppenamt for its “sober assessment of the political and military-political situation” and showed himself enthusiastic over Blomberg’s “noticeable turn away from the romanticism” of the Seeckt years, the future War Minister, in his assumptions, went beyond the relatively reality-based war games previously tested not only for exercise-technical reasons but for reasons of principle. He did not want to see that “great states tolerated military violations without military opposition.” The confrontation with France, as a delaying defensive struggle, he considered, under the assumed armament level of 1933, “after all not so hopeless as it may at first appear,” and demanded an expansion of preparatory work in the West, which was a delicate undertaking not least because of the demilitarization of the Rhineland.

From this attitude toward the wars simulated in such exercises there resulted a retreat into military and military-political fantasy. Under this precondition, the war situation could in each case be constructed in such a way that the wars still appeared just barely conductible.

For the Truppenamt journey of 1928 it was not merely established that militarily a war against Poland was “possible only for a short time and under loss of further German territories,” while for exercise-technical reasons one would assume a military equilibrium situation. Rather, the Truppenamt constructed in extensive and detailed fashion a situation in which even the Reichswehr could still just wage a two-front war. Blomberg, who evidently found it difficult to adjust himself to a condition in

which warfare was not thinkable, “mystified” military-political reality.

THE FIRST CONDEMNATION — BLOMBERG’S FALL, 1929

The military program that Blomberg formulated in his memorandum signed on 26 March 1929 led to a profound controversy over the aims and possibilities of military warfare. After the generational change in the army that had just taken place, it again tore open clear fronts in the Reichswehr Ministry and split the Reichswehr leadership into two camps: a military faction and a political faction. While Reichswehr Minister Groener and his chief of the Ministeramt, Schleicher, held fast to Clausewitz’s maxim of the primacy of politics over warfare, Blomberg had now turned Clausewitz on his head. His aims were genuinely military in nature, and he contradicted with determination both the military-political principles of Groener and Schleicher and the political and military calculation of employment which Groener had sketched out for the Reichswehr only a few weeks earlier.

Groener, who undoubtedly understood himself as a pupil of Schlieffen, had, under the compulsion of circumstances, developed principles of an extraordinarily flexible military policy that had scarcely anything more to do with the purely military-strategic maxims of the Prussian Chief of the General Staff. On 24 March 1929 there had been a fundamental discussion about national defense in the apartment of the Reichswehr Minister, at which, besides Schleicher and the Chief of the Naval Command Office Admiral Brützel, Blomberg too was present. Groener, who already in 1919 had repeatedly emphasized the priority of domestic policy, here announced a deep intervention in the military planning structure of the Reichswehr. In his remarks he referred to ideas that he had postulated in his memorandum *The Armored Ship* of November 1928 — a programmatic key document. The thought of a great war was excluded by him from the outset. The Reichswehr Minister did not believe in an immediate threat by other powers so long as Germany kept to the rules of defenselessness and dependence and avoided a direct escalation of the conflict between France and Germany. On the basis of this axiomatic conviction he wanted not only to restrict the Reichswehr to purely defensive tasks; even in this field of employment he still distinguished between senseless and purposeful resistance. In the case of a “Polish predatory attack on East Prussia,” according to Groener, the Reichswehr was to react with delaying defense until the League of Nations or a great power intervened in Germany’s favor. He described exclusively Poland as the potential opponent of the Reichswehr, while France — entirely in the sense of Stresemann’s policy of revision — remained excluded because of its clear military superiority. The armed force had thus, in an internal Reichswehr discussion, been defined as an instrument of the political leadership and limited to tasks that appeared realistic.

Blomberg, who in any case had never wanted to belong to the “Schleicher clique in the Reichswehr Ministry,” could not and would not, as the bearer of operational planning, resign himself to Groener’s restricted objective and subordinate himself to his instructions. Two days after the fundamental discussion in Groener’s apartment he sent a summary of his memorandum to the important offices of the ministry, among them the Ministeramt under Schleicher. In it he asked, alluding to Groener’s security policy: “What happens if, despite all treaties, signatures, and concessions, France nevertheless sets about violating us? Does not the support of treaties first become effective, or at least strengthened, by the fact that we also defend ourselves militarily?”

A provocation. The reply of the Ministeramt to the memorandum sent by Blomberg was not long in coming and was very clear: Schleicher here expressly referred Blomberg to the discussion of 24 March and again underlined his own standpoint and that of the Reichswehr Minister, namely “that one must summon the courage to admit that there can be political-military entanglements in which a struggle is

to be described from the outset as hopeless, all the more since the munitions and equipment situation will for an unforeseeable time not even permit a longer delaying struggle.” In contrast to Blomberg, Schleicher “for the time being considered one-sided defense in the East alone correct,” and pointed out once more to the Chief of the Truppenamt that the practical preparations for defense in the West demanded by him “are not practicable according to the decisions of the Reich government currently in force.” It may be noted in passing that this was the extension of an old dispute in the Reichswehr leadership: in 1919 the German signing of the peace treaty stood or fell on whether the army, if the war were resumed, should offer resistance on the Rhine and at the same time proceed offensively against Poland. Groener, in clear recognition of what was possible, rejected this scenario and made possible the end of the war and the German signature at Versailles.

The fundamental controversy between Blomberg and the ministerial summit of the Reichswehr pressed toward a decision when Blomberg, despite Groener’s decisions and Schleicher’s intervention, elevated his disputed memorandum to the “guideline for current further work and for the checking of results achieved.” In doing so he set himself on a collision course with the “political generals.” Against this, the Ministeramt successfully asserted the already stated views of the Reichswehr Minister and caused Blomberg to make a decisive weakening of his writing, through which the memorandum of 26 March 1929 lost, by mid-July 1929, every significance as a directional basis of military preparation.

With this, Schleicher and Groener had enforced against Blomberg their claim to determine guidelines in questions of operational planning and had created the precondition for a purpose-definition of all mobilization preparations perceived as oriented toward reality.

Against this background it is not surprising that Blomberg, as Chief of the Truppenamt, was replaced at the end of September 1929 by Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord and transferred as commander of the 1st Division to the remote Military District I in East Prussia.

Blomberg himself deals extensively in his memoirs with the reasons that led to his fall, and finds them both in a conflict with the Prussian government in questions of national defense and in an intrigue by Schleicher. This appears entirely plausible, even though the preceding reflections on his memorandum should have shown that the reasons for Blomberg’s fall as Chief of the Truppenamt lay far deeper in the political sphere than Blomberg had evidently been able to imagine.

He writes: “Around Heye’s succession there developed (...) a dispute. General Heye had named me as his successor and had told me so. [...]. It turned out that Schleicher had in mind an entirely different successor for Heye (...). I myself did not belong to Schleicher’s circle of friends; I had never become a participant in his cultivated and amusing bachelor sociability; in short, we were both quite alien to each other, so that in me he could not find the personal relationship to the Chief of Army Command that he had set himself and that coincided with the plans of his own demands. He (...) pushed forward his own candidate, an old regimental comrade, General von Ha[Hammerstein, the author notes]. Whether General Heye had now strongly advocated me as his successor, or whether Schleicher considered me difficult to remove for other reasons, in any case he brought heavy artillery against me, as he was already accustomed to doing when removing others. He was enough of a politician that he knew no inhibitions, and he was (...) cunning-clever.”

The Chief of the Truppenamt had also concerned himself with the organization of the so-called small war. During the Ruhr struggle, within the framework of national defense, a secret organization, the Feldjäger patrols, had been formed, which were organized by T1 and whose task it was, in case of war, to carry out disruptive operations in small units behind the enemy front. Defensive in their nature, the

exercises for small war, which were also carried out in the demilitarized zone, constituted a direct violation of the Treaty of Versailles. They were therefore kept secret from the government. For camouflage, official prohibitions were issued which were known to the Army Command.

At the end of 1928 the Prussian political police learned that these Feldjäger had not, as demanded, been dissolved, but were still holding exercises, and that in Hesse-Nassau even National Socialists belonged to them. Only in the summer of 1928 Blomberg, accompanied by collaborators, had been at an inspection of Feldjäger service in Hinterpommern. A war game in a sand table was demonstrated to him, as well as a night raid in the area of Großtegelow on a Polish divisional commander traveling to the front by automobile. The results of the exercises had convinced him.

In a meeting on 9 November 1928, Groener, Heye, and Blomberg declared to the Prussian Minister President Otto Braun and the Prussian Interior Minister Carl Severing that the Feldjäger officially no longer existed and had been being dismantled for two years. As Blomberg later writes, this corresponded to “our chosen line of camouflage, namely to deny.”

The official “denial,” however, had for Blomberg an unpleasant aftermath. Either, as he thought, a denunciation from the Rhineland had occurred in spring 1929, or it had become public that he himself had participated as a spectator in the officially forbidden exercises. Blomberg describes the situation as follows: “This time the Reich government and the Prussian government seized upon it. (...) A cabinet meeting was scheduled with the participation of the Prussian Minister President and Interior Minister, in order to call the Reichswehr to account. Besides Groener and Schleicher, who participated by virtue of office, General Heye and, contrary to all rules, also the Chief of the Truppenamt were summoned before the cabinet. The denunciation was presented by Braun and Severing with passion and malice. [...] Groener, Schleicher, and Heye were questioned one after another. They knew nothing! [...] I took cover by pushing forward our official prohibitions of small war. It was not beautiful, but it was unavoidable if we did not want, like our government in questions of national defense, to fold our hands in our lap.”

After the meeting was suspended, Blomberg left Berlin on General Staff business. Two days later he received a communiqué ordering him back to the Reichswehr Ministry. “I remember clearly,” he reports, “that at once a great mistrust of Schleicher filled me. In Berlin I hurried immediately to him! With great coolness he painted for me a situation that he called ‘a very nasty situation.’ [...] Schleicher told me in dry words that I would not be able to be held and would have to take my leave. My astonishment was as great as my indignation, though it was directed not so much against the Social Democratic ministers as against my Reichswehr Minister Groener, or, more precisely, against the real wire-puller, against Schleicher. They themselves had denied before the cabinet what they must have known in large outline, and now they had probably arranged things so that I was to be sent into the desert. On the following day I learned that a cabinet meeting had been scheduled over my case, but that I myself was not to take part in it (...). After hours Schleicher called me and informed me in an unmistakably sweet-sour tone that General Heye had saved me. He had, so to speak, placed himself before me with outspread arms, taken all responsibility upon himself, and logically demanded his own dismissal. On all sides people had wanted to avoid this sharpening of the matter, and so the ministers contented themselves with the assurance that I should receive a new service assignment outside Berlin (...).”

Blomberg’s perception of the events as an “attack” by Schleicher against him had slightly paranoid features, since the causes of his transfer to East Prussia are unquestionably not to be sought primarily and exclusively in an intrigue by Schleicher. Blomberg’s friend Stülpnagel, rather, regards it as a

“legend” that Blomberg was relieved as Chief of the Truppenamt “for reasons connected with border-protection questions” and was, as military district commander, in a sense “punitively transferred” to East Prussia. He gives an equally plausible and surprisingly simple personnel-political explanation for Blomberg’s transfer and points out that this was, after all, also a promotion: Heye himself had intended him as his successor as Chief of Army Command; since Stülpnagel at that time was still too young for such a promotion, he was to reach the rank of lieutenant general earlier than usual. Stülpnagel: “I had, for comradely reasons toward others, rejected this intention for myself alone and at least demanded that, alongside me as Chief of the Army Personnel Office, General von Blomberg too, as Chief of the Truppenamt, be made lieutenant general early. This proposal was accepted. Blomberg became commander in Military District I,” was appointed lieutenant general on 1 October 1929, “and I [Stülpnagel] became commander in Military District III Berlin.”

THE GENERAL “WITHOUT QUALITIES” (1930–1934)

LIFE IN MILITARY UTOPIA:

MILITARY DISTRICT COMMANDER IN EAST PRUSSIA (1930–1933)

Blomberg was to remain in East Prussia, the symbol of Germany’s fragmentation after the First World War, for three and a half years. As military district commander he was the legal successor of the earlier commanding generals. The new activity in Königsberg was interrupted twice: by his journey to the United States in autumn 1930, and by his employment at the Disarmament Conference in Geneva, from 1 February 1932 to 30 January 1933. In Blomberg’s own perception, the change of service assignment represented a caesura in his previous career pattern. In East Prussia the radius of his activity and influence necessarily narrowed. He remained embittered over the entire course of the affair that had banished him to Königsberg, blamed the Schleicher clique, the “world of the Herrenklub,” and the “political generals,” and showed himself deeply vexed by Weimar military policy and its exponents. Not least for this reason, the period of service in East Prussia had decisive influence on the radicalization of his own military policy and worldview, and marks the incubation phase of his affinity for National Socialism. A mentality of invasion specific to the time and region also acted upon the lieutenant general’s image of war and worldview.

Despite the loss of power and the initially prevailing feeling of having been “shoved aside,” Blomberg nevertheless spent a very happy time with his family in Königsberg. From the ex post perspective, the memories of this section of his life seemed to him “pure and untroubled,” and East Prussia was for him “without fault.”

After the autumn exercises of 1929 he first drove alone to the Reich’s eastern outpost; the family followed, taking leave with heavy hearts from friends and relatives and from the apartment in the old General Command in Moabit. The children had begun to live their own lives. Both sons served in Cavalry Regiment 13 in Hanover. Henning, the elder, had married Ruth von Hammerstein-Equord; Ursula had married Lieutenant Colonel Bürker, with whom she had moved to Ludwigsburg. Sybille had gone to Oxford to study after passing her Abitur. Only Dorothee, the youngest, still lived in the parental home. Incidentally, all of Blomberg’s children remained attached to military life and to the soldierly tradition of the family: both sons became officers; all three daughters married officers.

The atmosphere and landscape of picturesque East Prussia exercised a special and lasting fascination on Blomberg: “The forests and fields, the rivers and lakes, and then the sea and its coast hold me

captive at all times. Just as my dreams sometimes lead me to the North Sea, so the East Prussian land came to me additionally as a dreamland. [...] East Prussia was and is a beautiful and rich land (...). Seen from Berlin and from the West, the province might have seemed backward, since it was a land of small towns and agriculture, not of industry (...). Agriculture, horse and cattle breeding determined the character of the province. (...) Yet the closedness of East Prussia brought people close to one another. One could almost say that everyone knew everyone. (...) The horse was a unifying bond for East Prussians of all strata. (...) The smell of the stable was legitimate. Horse races, tournaments, breeding tests, and auctions were a matter for everyone.”

Besides the East Prussians’ love of horses, which Blomberg enthusiastically shared, he especially valued the fact that the geographical isolation of the military district offered him a degree of independence not granted to other military district commanders. As he writes with satisfaction in his memoirs, he finally had “fool’s freedom,” in order to realize his own military concepts, to try out new tactical forms, and to drive forward the militarization of the province. Far away from the switching centers of military power, the Schleicher clique in the Reichswehr Ministry could exert little influence on his military-political decisions.

Was precisely this the intention of the “Schleicher clique”? Was Blomberg’s engagement in questions of border protection to be directed from West to East in order to remove its political explosive force? While national defense extended across all Germany, border protection in the proper sense, since the “Guidelines” approved by the Reich government on 26 April 1929, was restricted “to the eastern provinces of Prussia, i.e. East Prussia, Pomerania east of the Oder, the Border March of Posen-West Prussia, the Frankfurt an der Oder government district, and the provinces of Upper and Lower Silesia (...)” Only in the eastern provinces of Prussia was it permitted to store material, compile lists of names, and register the men fit for military service. For East Prussia, six border-defense formations were planned, each consisting of at least one regiment with artillery and engineer groups. Schleicher too must have known that Blomberg was the right man for the position of military district commander in this region, since — irrespective of Blomberg’s own perception — in questions of border and national defense Schleicher was a decided opponent of the cautious policy of the Prussian government.

A draft letter from Schleicher to Blomberg of 21 February 1930 proves that Blomberg, from Königsberg, had asked Schleicher for a discussion. It cannot be reconstructed either whether the desired conversation took place or whether Blomberg planned to admit his error with regard to his supposed sidelining. In any case, the tensions between the two seemed to have eased somewhat a year later, as shown by a postcard from Blomberg to Schleicher. In it he apologizes amiably: “Dear Schleicher! It may well be that I myself was stupid. Now everything is fine! Best greetings. Yours, Blomberg.” However it may have been, the supreme military-political maxim of the new military district commander was from then on the consistent implementation of the “anti-Seeckt course” he had already pursued in Berlin. Taking into account the geographical peculiarities of the military district, Blomberg relied, first, on the consistent alignment of officer training with the conception of the leadership army, applying military-pedagogical educational principles in the sense of Muff and Reinhardt. Second, he exceeded the limits of the prohibitions of the Versailles Treaty as far as possible, in order to test modern weapons and techniques in combat exercises, autumn maneuvers, and field maneuvers. Furthermore, in the sense of preparing a “people’s war,” what mattered to him was integrating all available reserves into East Prussian border and national defense.

For the implementation of his aims, Blomberg found ideal framework conditions in Military District I: the region, isolated from the “Reich” by the Polish Corridor, was perceived by the population as especially endangered and threatened. This collective fear of invasion, alongside other factors, led to

high military readiness within broad circles. Thus “not only members of the most diverse political associations took part, but also the offices, such as district administrative offices, gave important assistance, as did the provincial finance presidium and the upper postal directorate.” Public opinion within the province exerted considerable pressure on the men fit for service, so that one can hardly speak of real “voluntariness.” Blomberg reports that troop and combat exercises in Military District I took on a kind of folk-festival character and always took place under the cheering of a large crowd of spectators. Thus, in exercises and maneuvers, according to the military district commander, “a considerable number of temporary volunteers were incorporated into the troop formations. These were either old soldiers who wanted to refresh their abilities, or young temporary volunteers to whom we gave a short training. (...) The training of the temporary volunteers consisted of a short training of several weeks, of special courses for machine gun, mortar, and gun; further, of compressed courses for junior leaders and leaders; and finally of incorporation into the troop units for the exercise periods on troop training grounds and in the autumn maneuvers. In East Prussia we made tests as to what minimum time was necessary to train a peasant lad on a weapon. I recall that after nine weeks of training we conducted live firing and field artillery. Only the gun leaders were old soldiers.”

Besides the military-political, geographical, and cultural framework conditions of the military district, the personnel conditions Blomberg found in Königsberg also suited him. His first chief of staff, Colonel Erich von Bonin, who until 1926 had been department chief in the Army Organization Department of the Berlin Truppenamt, who had the reputation of being a republican and was even decried as “red,” thought in questions of national defense similarly to Blomberg, namely that “the whole people” had to be involved. In East Prussia Bonin had worked first as battalion commander and then as Blomberg’s chief of staff to realize this conception, by striving not only for cooperation with the right-wing associations — traditionally the bearers of border defense — but, beyond that, intensifying the relations of the East Prussian Reichswehr with the trade unions and the Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold. Blomberg supported him in this, since, regardless of individual political preferences, he wanted to include every possible force in border defense.

In the eastern provinces in particular, however, the general attitude toward the Reichsbanner was shaped by deep mistrust. The “red” Bonin therefore had decided opponents within the troops, with whose help the East Prussian Junkers forced his recall in 1930. Count Eulenburg-Wicken, as a member of the Wehrgemeinschaft in East Prussia, had dealt intensively with national and border defense and in autumn 1929 had complained in writing to Heye about Bonin, who “paid homage to democratic ideas,” and had therefore called on the Chief of Army Command to take action against the colonel. Bonin was transferred to the Reichswehr Ministry, but soon afterward took his leave.

In East Prussia Blomberg was able to show that he understood virtuously how to circumvent the military restrictions of the Versailles Treaty, or — as he himself later expressed it — “to make much out of little.” By the end of 1932 the formation of three border-defense divisions with recruits in East Prussia had been completely carried out in personnel terms and partly also in training terms. Military District I, in which four border-defense district commands were located, divided among the government districts of Königsberg, Allenstein, Gumbinnen, and Marienwerder, served as a kind of “testing ground” for the testing of forbidden weapons. For the artillery, for example, a new anti-aircraft gun with associated special equipment had been developed; the 9th Battery of Artillery Regiment I in East Prussia was the anti-aircraft training battery for the other batteries of the army and was the first to be equipped with the new weapons.

Among the fetters that the Versailles Treaty had placed on the Reichswehr in connection with national defense was that there could be no field fortifications within a distance of fifty kilometers from the

national border. Nevertheless, according to Blomberg's instructions, his collaborators completed the blocking zone close to the East Prussian border. Among the construction measures of the border and national-defense system pushed through by Blomberg in Berlin and realized in East Prussia was the construction of the so-called "Heilsberg Triangle" in the core of the province. In the establishment of the triangle, planned intention and the conditions resulting from the situation complemented one another: "We created a fortified operational camp with support on the coast, in which delaying combat could be conducted without sacrificing the whole province until reinforcement from the Reich arrived. (...) The Heilsberg Triangle represented a widely stretched reinforced field fortification."

"At that time," Blomberg describes the situation in East Prussia, "for our East Prussian Reichswehr only a struggle of the inferior against a strong superiority could come into question. In our exercises, and precisely in the arrangement of the autumn maneuvers, we let ourselves be guided by this: marching, delaying combat, breaking off, blocking, and other forms of small war, regrouping in darkness, surprising formation of focal points, counterattack out of the defense, and finally the planned, ranged attack (...)." In his further development of the methods of "small war," Blomberg dreamed of a repetition of the Prussian reforms and moved in the feeling of a return of the events before 1813. In this reception of the Wars of Liberation, the Reichswehr was to become the true "school of the nation," as the reformers of the Prussian army had once demanded. In order to reach this aim, Blomberg, who in Hermann Rauschning's perception did indeed have "something of the spirit of Scharnhorst," cooperated with every grouping that could participate in the defense of the military district. When, at his later farewell from Königsberg on 10 February 1933, he received from his military district an engraving showing General Yorck before the East Prussian estates, he understood this as an allusion and confirmation that his "work had succeeded."

Despite this people's-war romanticism, which corresponded to the collective feeling of crisis and the Versailles trauma of the time, Blomberg's self-confidence as an officer continued — in contrast to most officers of his generation — to result only to a very small degree from orientation toward the past, mediated by military tradition-building and studies of war history. In the foreground stood his belief in the beginning of a new age and the tense expectation of a technomorphic turn. His conception of "people's war" went far beyond the idea of a renaissance of the Wars of Liberation, as is shown by his continuing intensive theoretical and practical occupation with the ideas of the "Young Generation" and Stülpnagel's people's-war concept of 1924.

In Königsberg Blomberg had begun to attend lectures on philosophy and history at the Albertina University. The University of Königsberg, very neglected until 1918 and, from 1920, as part of the "island East Prussia," additionally burdened with severe disadvantages of location, had developed, comparable with the flowering period of Kant's time, into the "intellectual radiating center of the East." Among others, the historian Hans Rothfels taught history at the Albertina from 1926 to 1934; even if Blomberg does not explicitly comment on individual lecturers whom he heard at the Albertina, it is to be assumed with the greatest probability that he also attended Rothfels's lectures. Why would he not have? After all, Rothfels understood himself as a thinker for the traditional leading strata, especially the Junkers, the military, the ministerial bureaucracy, and the Protestant state church. As adviser to the East Prussian leading strata, the Reichswehr staffs, and the Baltic irredenta, he was anything but a National Socialist; but he regarded the alliance with the National Socialist mass movement as an indispensable component of the overthrow at home and the subsequent expansionist unfolding of power. Rothfels welcomed the Weimar presidential cabinets as a "revival of the old authoritarian state"; they were, however, to be "only transition," and he pleaded for an alliance between the presidential regime and the National Socialists, who were to be integrated into the construction of the state. From 1932–33 "all-German" and "völkisch" visions were added. From the ruins of Weimar a new "Reich" was to emerge.

The Jewish scholar, who from 1931–32 onward drew the rising forces of the bündisch-conservative counterrevolution under his spell like no other historian, was with high probability also among the men whom Blomberg met once a month within the framework of a lecture circle, the so-called “Kränzchen.” The “Kränzchen” was an institution going back to Kant’s time. The core consisted of professors of the university, around whom other men of Königsberg’s intellectual life grouped themselves. They met in order to discuss the political and intellectual themes of the time over food and wine. The Kränzchen was committed to a high ideal of education, so that Blomberg understood his participation as an honor, and surely was entitled to understand it that way. In his memoirs Blomberg does not say whether in the Kränzchen, whose membership structure has not been transmitted, people discussed a “new Reich” or the problems of a national revolution, as they did in the Königsberg circle close to the NSDAP to which Fritz-Dietlof Graf von der Schulenburg belonged. The discourse about such themes, however, appears entirely probable in view of their topicality at the time and their significance in Blomberg’s intellectual structure of thought.

FIRST CONTACTS WITH NATIONAL SOCIALISM

Until Blomberg’s transfer to Königsberg, no kind of contact can be established with members of the military who showed an affinity for National Socialism. His assumption of duty in East Prussia, however, coincided with the rapid spread of the NSDAP’s popularity throughout Germany. That at this point there was thus a sharpened awareness of National Socialism emerges clearly from his notes. Blomberg on this: “National Socialism, insofar as the main emphasis lay on the national element, had to lie close to us in threatened and ceded East Prussia. The patriotic forces that had previously been strong in the land were strongly attracted by National Socialist propaganda. The slogan made sense to many; its representatives, insofar as one knew them, did not always please.”

Like most of his contemporaries, Blomberg had lived through the stations of the “time of struggle,” with such key dates as the Kapp Putsch, Hitler Putsch, and the Ulm officers’ trial. It had not escaped him that more and more officers — above all young officers — showed themselves receptive during the twenties to the body of thought of the rapidly growing National Socialist movement. In his diaries from the Stuttgart period at the beginning of the twenties he commented on political development as a distantly critical observer and with a certain lack of understanding. His assessment was thereby reduced to a very selective judgment of what he understood by communism and nationalism. During his hospital stay in Vienna in 1929 he had for the first time come into contact with a convinced Nazi; this had appeared in the figure of the treating physician.

The maxim of the apolitical soldier made it possible for him to receive the real-political facts only superficially and to retreat into the standpoint of the observer and departmental egoist. In addition, as he later writes almost apologetically, he had “too much to do in the military sphere to devote full participation to the movement.”

In his memoirs he explains: “At that time I did indeed watch Hitler and the movement, but without concentrated expectations, without trust in the idea (...). What I saw or heard of Nazi people struck me as strange; they did not win me over. All the same, the movement could no longer be excluded.” It was the main exponents of National Socialism in Königsberg, such as Gauleiter Erich Koch, their “human type,” and, according to Blomberg’s recollection, also the “racial question,” that irritated him. The proletarian-loud side of many National Socialist adherents appeared especially questionable to him.

“National Socialism had shown itself, through the wretchedness of those involved, more ridiculous than heroic,” he judges. Nevertheless he understood the National Socialists as an important source for recruiting men for national defense. The defensive conception for the protection of the German eastern border thus also included close cooperation with the SA, which at this point did not yet represent any danger to the Reichswehr’s monopoly of military power. The contact between Blomberg and the East Prussian National Socialists and SA men was established by Bonin’s successor as Chief of Staff in Military District I, Walter von Reichenau. After a year as Chief of Staff of the Signals Inspectorate in the Reichswehr Ministry, the ambitious Reichenau had been transferred in 1930, at Blomberg’s wish, to the East Prussian Military District I. From then on until 1935 Reichenau was to be Blomberg’s closest collaborator and of decisive influence on the policy of the Reichswehr leadership.

When Blomberg learned of Reichenau’s death in 1942 in his exile in the Bavarian mountains, the news moved him deeply: none of his collaborators, he explained, had rendered him better services and none had stood closer to him. Blomberg placed great trust in his chief of staff, welcomed his vitality, and left him a free hand in many military-district matters. Reichenau repaid this with great commitment. Thus, for example, in the field of military propaganda — one of his special fields after the seizure of power — he showed himself highly inventive. As a reflex of the fear widespread in East Prussia that Poland might use internal and external political difficulties of the Reich in order to seize German border territories by coup de main, in 1932 he had a first lieutenant of Infantry Regiment 3 publish, under the pseudonym Hans Nietram, a brochure bearing the title: Attention!! East-Marches Radio! Polish Troops Crossed the East Prussian Border Tonight!

During his absence, in the USA and Geneva, Blomberg let Reichenau fill his position in practice independently. Reichenau, however, seemed interested only conditionally in the tasks that the military district offered him and appears to have spent more time in Berlin. The reason for this was, at least according to what Stülpnagel claims to know, that Reichenau wanted to pursue “political snooping around” in the capital. The East Prussian landowners worried about the orphaned military district, as is shown by the letter of complaint from a manor owner in Allenburg to Schleicher of 5 February 1932, in which he asks for an official representative of Blomberg in Königsberg.

Until his appointment as chief of staff, nothing had indicated that the then lieutenant colonel Reichenau would have a steep, though changeful, career before him. Born in Karlsruhe in October 1884 as the son of a Prussian lieutenant general, his development followed the classic career pattern: after the Abitur he entered the Prussian army, became a lieutenant in the 1st Guard Field Artillery Regiment in 1904, and in 1911 was transferred to the War Academy for training. Blomberg had come to know his later collaborator in the First World War, where Reichenau served as a front officer of the Guard Field Artillery and later in the General Staff. After that the paths of the two men had separated. After the end of the war, Reichenau was taken into the Reichswehr as a captain. Despite his Prussian-aristocratic appearance, reminiscent of the Junker caricatures of Simplicissimus, which Blomberg too possessed, Reichenau did not quite fit the template of the Prussian officer, and like his superior he was an outsider in the officer corps.

Blomberg later characterized his long-time collaborator as “ambitious. (...). His political conviction was elastic, and finally there was also a little piece of snob in him. (...) He was a General Staff officer of great intelligence (...) above all a strong, indeed stormy personality with strong self-willed drives which, alongside the promotion of his own standing, greatly increased his many-sided achievements. (...) Alongside his athleticism, Reichenau cultivated motor sport. He was a brilliant driver who, despite all daring, never suffered an accident. One could not reproach him with leaning to the left. He certainly knew how to exploit political circumstances in his conduct, but in his inclinations and aspirations he

stood entirely on the side of the 'counts.' He had a count's daughter as wife and in East Prussia preferred association with counts, who are as countly there as in Silesia, which means something."

In their wishes and aims Blomberg and Reichenau resembled each other; in what they embodied, as also in their outward appearance, they differed colossally: the one, Blomberg, tall and slender; the other, Reichenau, short and stocky. Foertsch — later collaborator of Reichenau in the Ministeramt of the Reichswehr Ministry — summarizes: "Blomberg was determined more from feeling, Reichenau more from the intellect. Blomberg was a man of compromises, Reichenau an opponent of every compromise solution." Like his superior, Reichenau too was to a high degree open to everything new or revolutionary and ready to impose it.

After the end of the First World War Reichenau had put into practice what Blomberg had only hesitantly considered, and had entered a Freikorps in Silesia, consciously negating the traditional army idea. Like Blomberg he was very interested in other countries and languages, and even before the First World War had undertaken extensive journeys into European foreign countries, the United States, and South America. Reichenau, however, did not share Blomberg's love of the horse and of riding. While Blomberg rode out every morning, Reichenau put on his gym shoes every morning in order to make a forest run. In 1913 Reichenau, who had long belonged to the Berlin Sport Club, together with Karl Diem and two other experts had visited the USA in preparation for the Olympic Games planned for 1916. For that reason Reichenau bore among the officers the nickname "sport fanatic," and his passion for sports that were not tennis and riding was considered disgusting. Such criticism from his comrades, however, concerned him little. Reichenau had fallen into a regular Anglomania. Within his family circle — his wife, with whom he had a son and a daughter, was a Silesian countess — English was always spoken. He cultivated English clothing, manners, and customs, quoted English poems from memory, and even ventured to translate Shakespeare sonnets.

To see Reichenau merely as a snob does not do him justice, for he was vital, ambitious, unscrupulous, and political. He was a coolly calculating military man with the unconditional "will to power." When one speaks of politics in connection with officers of the Reichswehr, this concept — behind the camouflage of an apolitical attitude — is always iridescent, never unambiguous, as was shown by the example of Blomberg's understanding of politics in the twenties. With Reichenau the concept of the political was inseparably connected.

Reichenau's sympathies for Hitler and National Socialism, which came to expression in his great commitment to a rapid integration of the military into the National Socialist regime and to cooperation between the Reichswehr and the SA, began in 1932 in the house of the Protestant military-district pastor and later Reich Bishop Ludwig Müller, who had already professed himself to the NSDAP in 1931. At the beginning of April 1932 Müller had organized a discussion between Reichenau and Hitler, during which Reichenau made himself acquainted with Hitler and his political conception and presented to him border-protection grievances connected with the conduct of the NSDAP in East Prussia. A few days earlier, during a house search by the Prussian police, materials had been found that confirmed the suspicion that the NSDAP was sabotaging East Prussian border defense. A speech by Hitler, which he had given shortly before in Lauenburg, also gave Reichenau cause for complaint. The later dictator had proclaimed that he did not want to "sacrifice his fighters for the system" — Weimar, the author notes — but wanted to "protect the borders only when the bearers of the present system had first been destroyed." Reichenau was nevertheless soon convinced by Hitler's political conception and his idea of revolutionary renewal, and Hitler too recognized Reichenau's affinity for the revolutionary need for renewal of the NSDAP.

In previous research the influence of the later General Field Marshal Reichenau on his long-time superior has always been strongly emphasized. The Machiavellian Reichenau supposedly understood how to “make” Blomberg and influenced and dominated him in his decisions; he could, according to the former collaborator of Reichenau and Blomberg, Hermann Foertsch, in a characterization of Reichenau, “set Blomberg up, so to speak, as scenery, since he knew exactly” that Blomberg was “not a great man.” Thus Blomberg’s appointment as Reichswehr Minister was long attributed to the influence of Reichenau, who, either alone or together with Ludwig Müller, had converted Blomberg to National Socialism and brought him into play as a candidate. In his memoir report titled *Schuld und Verhängnis*, Hermann Foertsch, citing statements by the then Chief of the Army Personnel Office, claimed that the ambitious Reichenau, as Blomberg’s chief of staff and demonstrably in contact with Hitler before 1933, actually had wanted to become Reichswehr Minister himself. But he had had to recognize that, in view of the massive resistance of Hindenburg and above all of the general officer corps, which strictly watched over the observance of seniority, he had no prospect. Therefore he initially contented himself with a promotion to major general and the leadership of the influential Ministeramt under the minister Blomberg, who was well disposed toward him and easy to influence. The later OKW chief Wilhelm Keitel considered it “certain” in his memoirs that Reichenau, during his stay in Berlin at the end of January 1933, had proposed Blomberg as Reichswehr Minister.

The American journalist John Günther even made the then field chaplain of the 1st Division commanded by Blomberg, Müller, into one of “Hitler’s best friends” and made him alone responsible for Blomberg’s nomination: “He [Müller] drew Hitler’s attention to Blomberg, and through this intervention by the reverend gentleman Blomberg received the post. Thereupon Müller was made Reich Bishop of the Protestant Church of Germany as a reward.” It is further claimed that Hitler had come to know Blomberg before 1933 “in the house of the military-district pastor Müller.” Blomberg names Müller, with whom his connection broke off even though their positions in the Third Reich — Reichswehr Minister and Reich Bishop — ought actually to have intensified it, and Reichenau as the men who had brought National Socialism near to him in East Prussia. Nevertheless, as is also shown by the cold strangeness with which Blomberg remembers Müller, the latter’s influence on him was entirely insignificant: “In East Prussia I found the first contact with National Socialism. The mediating link was, strangely enough, my Protestant divisional pastor, named Müller. He stood in close connection with Gauleiter Koch, who at that time, as I believed, was a middle-level official of the postal service. (...) Even in the idealism of my divisional pastor, who spun threads between us soldiers and the movement, I could not overlook quite earthly points of feeling.”

Neither was the later Reich Bishop Müller “one of Hitler’s best friends,” nor did he play a decisive role in Blomberg’s appointment, which also applies to Reichenau, as will still be shown.

Blomberg is said already in 1931 to have met “for the first time” with Hitler, “who made a great impression on the admittedly intelligent, but easily influenced officer.” In *Die Gegenwart* of 15 February 1949, Blomberg is turned into Hitler’s “companion of early conversations in Königsberg,” “where Hitler had met him on election trips,” and the GDR author Wolfgang Rüge credits Hitler with having “tracked down” Blomberg, “who already swore by the swastika but at the same time enjoyed Hindenburg’s trust.” Hans Rudolf Berndorff was likewise convinced that Blomberg must already have had contacts with Hindenburg and Hitler before his appointment. In what way, he thought, was however “still today an unexplained secret.” “It is certain only that in those days he spoke secretly with Hindenburg. He was in Germany from Geneva on Christmas leave.” Berndorff further assumes that Blomberg “already in December 1932 had made political agreements with Hitler and with Herr von Hindenburg. As described, in deepest concealment.”

It becomes adventurous when Göring sends an airplane to Königsberg “to have Blomberg brought to Berlin.”

That all these speculations were incorrect can be demonstrated from Blomberg’s notes: “In Königsberg I had come to know neither the Führer nor his capitanos, simply because that did not accord at that time with my official position.” Political participation was forbidden to Reichswehr officers. What reason would he have had to write an untruth here? The assumptions about Blomberg’s acquaintance with Hitler before 1933 served to support the thesis that the general had already been a “convinced National Socialist” before 1933. One origin of the topos of Blomberg as an “old fighter” lies in Harold C. Deutsch’s standard work on the Blomberg-Fritsch crisis. Deutsch, who had conducted extensive interviews with contemporary witnesses for his book, had come upon a Dr. Dr. Erich Schultze, who served him several untruths. Deutsch first introduces Schultze in the chapter of his book titled “Blomberg’s Elevation”: “Dr. Schultze, then Social Democratic city councillor of Königsberg and provincial councillor of East Prussia, was a secret Reichswehr officer, sent to East Prussia by Reichswehr Minister Groener in order to build up a reserve system that at the proper time could be extended over the rest of the Reich.” What is correct in this is that Schultze was a “provincial councillor” — one of many in East Prussia. He was neither a “secret” officer, nor had “War Minister” Groener sent him to East Prussia. Nor at this time was he “city councillor of Königsberg.” He became that only in summer 1933 under the sun of grace of Gauleiter Erich Koch. Schultze suggested to Deutsch numerous stories that astonished through intimate knowledge of facts and persons: Blomberg had already before 1933, “on one of his journeys to Geneva,” taken a secret detour to Hitler’s “hideout” in the Berchtesgaden region and thereby concluded his alliance with Hitler. Actually, according to Schultze, he himself was supposed to undertake another journey to Hitler’s “hideout” in order to obtain Hitler’s consent for supporting the “East Prussian defense unit.” Schultze, however, as a convinced opponent of Nazism, had refused “to undertake the mission to Berchtesgaden,” so that Blomberg instead had to send the military-district pastor and later Reich Bishop Ludwig Müller to Hitler. “Hitler was delighted over this first sign of renewed contact with the Wehrmacht since the break in relations in the year 1923.” Of these legends, which permanently shaped the assessment of Blomberg, none corresponds to historical reality.

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THE GENEVA DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE: MILITARY-POLITICAL REALITY

His participation as delegation leader of the army at the Geneva Disarmament Conference in 1932 became a formative experience for the later War Minister.

Blomberg’s excellent negotiating technique, his diplomatic skill, his foreign-language abilities, and his military expertise had predestined him for this task. The choice of Blomberg, however, also seems to have been determined by political factors, for Groener had expressly supported Blomberg. Possibly he, and with him Schleicher, saw in Blomberg an officer sympathizing with the National Socialists, whom it was necessary to get rid of? Erich Kordt, who experienced Blomberg in Geneva and judged him to be “a man of moderate views,” contradicts this. He emphasizes that Blomberg’s adjutant Tschunke, who “himself inclined toward more radical views,” had “several times with slight disapproval informed him that his chief had little use for Hitler.” In any case, it is claimed that the reason for a “removal” of Blomberg lay in the fact that Blomberg at this time openly sympathized with National Socialism and

had expressed the wish for an NS government, or because he was “nervously shattered.” Brüning writes in his memoirs that he was surprised at the choice of Blomberg as delegate in Geneva, but had been informed by Schleicher to the effect that “this officer,” Blomberg, had no leadership qualities and that the appointment was only an honorable exit for him. It appears more probable that Blomberg, who in Military District I was driving forward the training of SA men and National Socialists as temporary volunteers, was once again to be slowed down in his paramilitary engagement. In autumn 1931 he traveled to Switzerland for a one-week orientation course. Of all the tasks that he had had to complete in his career so far, the military district commander viewed his Geneva mission most critically. Not only unwillingness, indeed aversion toward political involvement, his individual military philosophy, which could not be reconciled with the conditions of the Allies, and concern for his military district played a role here, but also the poor state of health of his wife Charlotte, whom he was reluctant to leave behind in Königsberg.

The conference, which had been prepared since 1925 by the disarmament commission of the League of Nations, was opened on 2 February 1932. Its president was the former British foreign minister Arthur Henderson.

From then on Blomberg spent weeks and months “in fairyland Geneva,” as he mockingly called the place of the conference, in the unfruitful atmosphere and empty dialectic of the Disarmament Conference.

The Geneva Conference stood from its beginning under the sign of the conflict between the demand for military equality represented by Germany and France’s striving for military security against Germany. Notes on the Disarmament Conference are found in Blomberg’s estate in the form of diary notes and keyword-like notes. They show increasing frustration and growing scorn in view of the meager negotiating results.

His contempt for politicians and statesmen, which he had already felt during the last weeks of the First World War and which had only been strengthened in connection with his departure from Berlin, was multiplied in Geneva. What was being negotiated in Geneva could not be reconciled with Blomberg’s military-political visions for the future and made him a vehement opponent of the proposed military equality of Germany within the framework of a system of collective disarmament. In the tough negotiations, Germany wanted to achieve full equality and full security through the disarmament of the other powers according to Germany’s model, or through an appropriate German rearmament. Everything else would have been for Blomberg a “deliberate deception of the world, a sham fight, a theatrical performance.” France wanted a preservation of the status quo and strategically provided delays.

Blomberg’s political disenchantment — in the representatives of the German Republic he saw “tiny dwarfs” — becomes unmistakable in his assessment of Brüning: “During the conference months we were visited twice by Reich Chancellor Brüning with the State Secretary of the Foreign Office, von Bülow. Brüning enjoyed in Geneva a great, even a sensational reputation. His governing with the paragraph of the emergency condition of the Reich constitution seemed to bring him international respect. In Geneva he tried to go together with England and the USA, without thereby offending France. In conversations with us soldiers he wanted to make us believe that he saw a way out in this direction. Of course that was an error, and I considered Brüning too sharp-sighted to be able to believe in his supposed confidence. With Brüning an important person had come to the helm, perhaps the most important of all statesmen of the postwar period up to 1933. But was he actually a statesman? Much was probably lacking in him for that, and precisely those qualities that make up the ‘evil’ in politics, in

Jacob Burckhardt's sense."

The encounter with Aga Khan, who had the role of second chief delegate of Great Britain at the Disarmament Conference, made a much more positive impression on Blomberg. What fascinated Blomberg about Aga Khan was that he was prince, pope, and god for his million-strong Mohammedan sect in India and Africa. "His believers worked industriously for him in order to give him the gold that allowed him to lead the life of a true nabob in Paris and London. He showed himself rarely in India, for a god-like being must make himself scarce. On the other hand, the journey to the homeland cost him nothing, but increased his wealth, since his followers presented him with gold in the amount of his body weight as a guest gift. Aga Khan was corpulent. But one could understand that he did not want to become lighter in Marienbad."

Aga Khan met several times with Blomberg in his hotel in order to pose questions to him about the First World War, since he wanted to write a book about it. Finally he invited Blomberg and his adjutant Fritz Tschunke to a breakfast at Madame Leger's inn in Thoiry near Geneva. Briand had met Stresemann there on the morning of 17 October 1926, seven days after the German delegation had entered the League of Nations. This event had dominated the international press for a week and was celebrated as a sign of the will for German-French understanding and as a turning point of the Disarmament Conference. At the same table where Briand and Stresemann had sat, Aga Khan prophesied to the impressed German officers "that Hitler would soon come to power and lead Germany upward."

The monotony of the routine in Geneva was interrupted for Blomberg only by short visits to Berlin and Königsberg; thus at Easter 1932 he had traveled to his family. He did not know that his wife Charlotte had only a few weeks left to live. On 11 May 1932 she died at the age of fifty-three. Left behind were the four adult children, the fifteen-year-old Dorle, and Blomberg, who during the twenty-eight years of marriage had always found in Charlotte the balancing and down-to-earth part of himself. Although he did not want to let the pain and grief over the loss show, her death changed his life in a fundamental way. "I lost (...) my wife, but this wound had nothing to do with my active life. The loss belonged to the innermost sphere, which was separated from the surrounding world." A few days later, after he had settled what was most necessary in Königsberg, Blomberg drove back to Geneva after the funeral on 14 May, where he buried himself in work and continued to attend the sessions of the conference.

Blomberg describes his feelings at this time as a feeling of "powerlessness," and observers claimed to have perceived a great change in him; they report symptoms of a deep depression, of physical exhaustion, hopelessness, and emptiness. Brüning, who experienced Blomberg in Geneva, described his appearance as "confused and unfocused," and Hermann Foertsch diagnosed: "Physically and psychologically he was unbelievably battered. When he came to Berlin during his Geneva period, people said that in half a year he would be finished. When, however, he received the task of War Minister, he became healthy again."

It is one of those accidents that from the retrospective seems to acquire a new significance that the last gift Blomberg received from his wife before her death was an edition of Goethe's Faust.

During this period of Blomberg's depression, the political situation in Germany had intensified. Schleicher had failed with his last concept, to checkmate Hitler in the opposition. The effects of the world economic crisis had opened all doors to political radicalism. In the switching centers of political power in Berlin's Wilhelmstraße, the tug-of-war had begun over whether one should, or even must, let the "strange" man from Austria, Hitler, who had so much success at the ballot box and in the street, come to power.

For all politicians in Germany, in the highly charged civil-war atmosphere of late 1932 and early 1933, it was of decisive importance who, as minister, would dispose over the armed power of the Reichswehr. The most varied names appeared in press speculation. The French press had already announced a change of government on 20 January 1933. According to this, Hitler was to become Reich Chancellor, Papen Foreign Minister, Hugenberg "crisis minister" for food and economy, and General von Stülpnagel Reichswehr Minister.

At his place of service in Geneva, Blomberg had read in the press the naming of his friend General Joachim von Stülpnagel as ministerial candidate and successor to Schleicher, and sent him, overjoyed but somewhat prematurely, a congratulation. Two days later Blomberg himself was minister.

The question of by what path a military specialist regarded as an outsider like Blomberg was "levered" into the exposed position of Reichswehr Minister is of decisive importance, and to this day there are considerable controversies over the circumstances of his appointment. These uncertainties are also grounded in the fact that his memoirs end with the death of his wife, only to begin again after his dismissal in 1938. On the basis of the extensive notes for his memoirs, 1933 to 1938, however, the circumstances of his appointment can be reconstructed. Confusion was contributed to by the fact that already in 1933, in a report on the "Hitler Cabinet," it had been recorded in formally correct but factually inaccurate fashion that Blomberg's appointment had occurred "on Adolf Hitler's proposal." In reality this was a mere formality, since the new Chancellor had to propose all ministers to the Reich President, including those forced upon him by the President himself.

The already described alleged secret agreements between Hitler and Blomberg before 1933 nourished not only the image of Blomberg as a National Socialist general before 1933 and the image of a conspiracy behind the back of the Reichswehr and the government; they also strengthened the thesis of a consequential influencing of Reich President Hindenburg, especially since they seemed to fit into the image of a "camarilla" behind the scenes.

After all, on 23 November 1932, that is, still during the Papen government, Hitler had been prepared, with a Reichswehr Minister Schleicher in his cabinet, to swallow, as it were, a "toad." He had written to State Secretary Meißner and thus to Hindenburg — despite his deep aversion to and mistrust of Schleicher, who had the reputation of making and unmaking chancellors — offering that after being commissioned by the Reich President he would, "beside other ministers to be taken over from the present government, propose to the Reich President himself for the Reichswehr Ministry, as his personal trusted man known to me, General von Schleicher; for the Reich Foreign Ministry Freiherr von Neurath." Instead, however, Schleicher himself was soon afterward called by Hindenburg as Reich Chancellor, whereby he certainly gained no sympathy from Hitler and his vassals. He became Hitler's mortal enemy with the failed attempt to take the second man of the NSDAP, Gregor Strasser, into his cabinet against Hitler's will, and in this way to split the NSDAP. The record of Schleicher's farewell audience with Hindenburg on 28 January 1933 likewise probably did not greatly please Hitler later, after he himself had become Chancellor and was able to inspect the protocol. In it, among other things,

it said: “The Reich Chancellor [Schleicher]: In the formation of the new Reich government, he asks the Reich President especially not to transfer the Reichswehr Ministry to any partisan of Hitler. That would place the Reichswehr in great danger. The Reich President replied that he also absolutely rejected such a thought on his own initiative.”

Otto Meissner, the State Secretary under Ebert, Hindenburg, and Hitler, contributed much to the formation of legends. To be sure, he should actually have been especially well informed about the circumstances of the transfer of power to Hitler, yet in his memoirs there is found the error of memory, or deliberate disinformation, arising from his need for a dramatizing justification of the Hindenburg decision of 30 January: Blomberg, he claimed, had already been secretly with Hindenburg before his official appointment as minister: “General von Blomberg, whom the Reich President, in order to hear his judgment, had summoned to Berlin at the end of January confidentially and without informing Reichswehr Minister and Reich Chancellor von Schleicher, explained to him that a national Reichswehr was the best solution and would undoubtedly be welcomed by the entire Wehrmacht.” Thus “in these days,” that is, in January 1933, General von Blomberg had been “brought” to Reich President von Hindenburg: “When Schleicher again appeared before Hindenburg on 26 January, he did not know that Blomberg had already explained to the Reich President that a national concentration under Hitler’s leadership was the best solution and would also be welcomed by the Reichswehr.” In a Schleicher biography published in spring 1983, the author, invoking Meissner’s statements, describes the “outrageous occurrence” of Blomberg’s “secret journey” to Berlin behind the back of Reichswehr Minister Schleicher. He notices that Papen in his memoirs “passes over” this incident, but he cannot know that the simple reason for non-mention was that no such incident had occurred. It continues: “If State Secretary Meissner’s memory did not deceive him, then Blomberg even put forward the monstrous false claim that a national coalition government under Hitler’s leadership would undoubtedly be welcomed by the entire Wehrmacht.” Before his appointment and swearing-in by Hindenburg on the morning of 30 January 1933, there had also been no meeting of Blomberg with Hitler in the Hotel Kaiserhof, as Michael Salewski writes.

According to Blomberg’s own notes, he had never seen Hitler before 30 January 1933. There had also been no “secret talks” behind the Reichswehr’s back — neither with Hitler nor with Hindenburg — before his appointment. According to his own recollection, he was first called by telephone in Geneva on 29 January 1933 and ordered to Berlin to Hindenburg for the morning of 30 January: “When a telephone call summoned me to Berlin on 29 January 1933, I did not suspect that a completely new phase of life was to begin with it.”

The disarmament desk officer in the Foreign Office at that time, Erich Kordt, who was also in Geneva at that moment, also remembered this “urgent telephone call.” Stülpnagel too reports that Blomberg was completely surprised by his appointment as Reichswehr Minister: “A telegram from Blomberg arrived to me with his congratulations on becoming Reichswehr Minister. Shortly afterward, however, Blomberg’s appointment as minister was announced. Blomberg himself sought me out shortly after his appointment and expressed his regret that he had now received the position intended for me. After my reply that this would never cloud the relationship between us, he declared that he was completely surprised by this appointment and was not at all prepared for this use.” The fifty-four-year-old thus had no idea what awaited him when, on the morning of the historic 30 January 1933, he stepped off the train at Anhalter Bahnhof.

THE ALLIANCE WITH HITLER (1933)

Blomberg, then, was not the preferred candidate of the National Socialists. He was Hindenburg's choice, which also seemed acceptable to Hitler. In the eyes of the aged Reich President and his closest circle, the general possessed enough authority and the best conservative references to fill successfully the office of Reichswehr Minister in a Hitler cabinet. Blomberg apparently also possessed that "social splendor in his appearance" that would have enchanted the old President Hindenburg. In fact, Blomberg enjoyed Hindenburg's special goodwill, which was certainly also attributable to the fact that the East Prussian agrarians had spoken very positively to Hindenburg about Blomberg as commander of Military District I. In addition, Schleicher had fallen from Hindenburg's favor through events that cannot be reconstructed, so that a turn toward one of Schleicher's opponents appears plausible already for psychological reasons.

After the war Hermann Göring in Nuremberg listed the conditions that Hindenburg required Hitler to fulfill before he was appointed Reich Chancellor on 30 January 1933. One of these conditions, he said, was that the "Reichswehr Minister likewise had to be filled by an independent personality, namely by a soldier; and he himself selected him without any involvement on our part, in the person of General von Blomberg, who at that time was at the Disarmament Conference in Geneva." Göring thereby confirmed something that Blomberg had already declared twelve years earlier, in February 1933, in an address in Kiel: "I am proud that the confidence of the Reich President has called me to the post of Reichswehr Minister." "The world looks upon us and especially upon the Wehrmacht. We are lifted out of the political struggle; for us there is only the German people. You know that for a German man it is a matter of living for Germany and dying for Germany. That shall be our vow."

Franz von Papen also clarified how, on that day when the Third Reich began its historical existence, Blomberg's appointment as Reichswehr Minister came about: "We then spoke further about possible candidates for the War Ministry. I proposed General Freiherr von Fritsch, whom I knew from my academy period and valued very highly. The Field Marshal did not reject him, but he hardly knew him personally, and I felt that he would prefer a man of his personal confidence. In this respect he mentioned General von Blomberg. He knew him from the time when Blomberg had commanded the East Prussian military district and considered him a soldier without political passions. As head of the German military delegation at the Geneva Disarmament Conference, Blomberg had shown that he possessed the adroitness necessary for a ministerial post." Colonel General Wilhelm Adam, Chief of the Truppenamt under Schleicher, reports that Göring had confided to him during a joint automobile trip in January 1938: "Hindenburg foisted Blomberg on us. He described him as the best soldier of the army." Hitler himself, after Blomberg's departure, emphasized in his speech before the generals on 5 February 1938, almost by way of excuse, "that it was not he, but Hindenburg, who had made General von Blomberg Reichswehr Minister."

Thus: by telephone Blomberg in Geneva received Hindenburg's order to report to him on the morning of 30 January 1933. Blomberg's adjutant at that time, Major Fritz Tschunke, had on the previous day telephoned his wife from Geneva to announce the surprising return for the next morning. Mrs. Tschunke, not hindered by any secrecy regulation, at once passed the unexpected good news on to the wife of Hammerstein's adjutant, Major Kuntzen, with whom she was friendly. She informed her husband, who then immediately called Geneva in order to discover the reason for this unannounced and apparently unmotivated journey home. Kuntzen reported the unsatisfactory information — that they themselves did not know the reason for the order to report to the Reich President — to General von Hammerstein, who in turn informed Schleicher. Kuntzen received the assignment to meet Blomberg the

next morning at the railway station and first bring him to Hammerstein. Hindenburg's adjutant, his son Oskar, also received the order to receive Blomberg as a precaution at Anhalter Bahnhof.

What Kuntzen could not foresee was the fact that in the Reich President's palace people already stood at this time under the psychological pressure of putsch rumors. For days the rumor had circulated that the Reichswehr, under the still-serving Reichswehr Minister Schleicher and the Chief of Army Command von Hammerstein, intended to put down Hitler in order to prevent Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor. On the night of 30 January the state of disintegration assumed threatening proportions. The National Socialists feared that the putsch would now come, that the guards would be withdrawn, and that the Potsdam garrison would march to Wilhelmstraße. Although the putsch plan was nothing more than a rumor, "Hitler held fast to this fixed idea until his end in the bunker of the Reich Chancellery." He also valued Blomberg especially because he was convinced that Blomberg, through his appointment as Reichswehr Minister, had prevented the Reichswehr putsch. This conviction evidently survived even the year 1938; at least until then it was an important factor among the reasons why Hitler for a long time placed almost unshakable trust in Blomberg.

Blomberg has been reproached for allegedly refusing obedience to his direct superior by failing to obey Hammerstein's order to report to him; for allowing himself, "Central American style," to be intercepted at the railway station and "dragged off" to the swearing-in. But this overlooks the fact that, when the order came from Hindenburg, the Supreme Commander of the Reichswehr, there could be no official chain-of-command route.

An agreement between Blomberg and Hindenburg seems to have occurred immediately, and that decided the question of government formation. Blomberg's daily order I of 31 January 1933 therefore also began "logically" with the sentence: "The confidence of our Commander-in-Chief, the Reich President von Hindenburg, has called me to the head of the Wehrmacht." Four days later he explained to the commanders: "In the formation of the cabinet, the question of the Reichswehr Minister played the main role. Entry of the Nazis into the government was decided when an active general was found ready to collaborate under Hitler. Other solution considered possible by Hitler: leading Nazi as Reichswehr Minister probably unacceptable to Reich President. After agreement Hitler-Blomberg — Monday eight o'clock — question had been decided and by 11:30 already sworn in."

The time of Blomberg's swearing-in as minister remains disputed. Was he sworn in immediately after reporting to Hindenburg, as Göring claimed in Nuremberg, or only later, together with the other cabinet members, as the new Reichswehr Minister?

According to the constitution, the appointment of a minister had to occur on the proposal of the Reich Chancellor, and his swearing-in after delivery of the document of the head of state countersigned by the head of government. A swearing-in of Blomberg before Hitler had assumed the office of Reich Chancellor would therefore have violated a basic rule of the Reich constitution.

In Blomberg's notes there are several drafts in which he tries to describe the events of that day which steered his life in a new direction. Looking back, he repeatedly grappled with the question "why me?" — a question that is indeed difficult to answer.

"Around eleven o'clock in the morning I was back in Wilhelmstraße," Blomberg recalls. "At Papen's, the agreements with Hitler, Göring, Hugenberg, and probably still other politicians were underway. I did not take part, since I had been called by Hindenburg not as a political person but as a soldier. Instead I walked in the ministerial gardens, which also offered experiences. From behind thick trees I

was stopped and questioned two or three times by younger politicians of the German National Party. (...) They were worried about Hitler's assumption of power and especially about new elections. In this they proved more far-sighted than their lord and master Hugenberg (...). Around twelve noon I was called to the Field Marshal. The men of the new Reich cabinet were assembled there. For the first time I saw Hitler and Göring. The worn leather coat that the latter wore revealed as yet nothing of his inclination to varied and ostentatious clothing. The Field Marshal stated in a few words the formation of the Hitler cabinet. Papen pressed for immediate taking of the oath. He probably wanted to be certain that nothing unexpected would still happen to the structure he had laboriously built.

“After a few minutes we were sworn Reich ministers of the Third Reich.”

From this one could conclude that Blomberg was sworn in together with the other ministers only around noon on 30 January. By contrast, Göring in Nuremberg justified the allegedly advanced swearing-in of Blomberg by saying that on the previous day he had informed the Reich President of the feared putsch plan of Schleicher and Hammerstein. “That was the reason why von Blomberg was appointed War Minister — or then Reichswehr Minister — two hours before the rest of the cabinet, in order thereby to exclude any false intervention by the Reichswehr.”

Blomberg sketched an authentic description of the events — insofar as they concerned him — as follows, and at the same time offered an unexpected explanation of the nervousness then prevailing in the Reichswehr Ministry: “So on the morning of 30 January 1933 I entered the office before these generals [Hammerstein and Bussche, the author notes]. There were no dramatic scenes. Hammerstein and Bussche had feared that I would be appointed Chief of Army Command. They were reconciled when they heard that I had become ‘only’ Reichswehr Minister. The situation was that command over the troops carried more weight than the position and function of the Reichswehr Minister.” Blomberg himself too, at this time, did not understand the occupation of a ministerial position exactly as a distinction for a soldier. And yet he had helped to open Pandora's box. What now did he find in it?

020

“WEHRHAFTMACHUNG” / MAKING MILITARILY CAPABLE

When, on the evening of 30 January 1933, the SA held its great torchlight procession through the Brandenburg Gate and Wilhelmstraße seemed to be sinking into a sea of swastika flags, Blomberg had become — after the Chancellor — the key figure of the cabinet. With his appointment as Reichswehr Minister he had received the chance to help shape decisively the relationship between army and Party, and the position of the armed power in Hitler's state. Was he now to realize what in twenty-four years had become the foundation-pillars of his military structure of thought? Unquestionably, in an alliance “Blomberg-Hitler” the Reichswehr could come closer to its military visions and ideas, and against the background of this belief Blomberg was to develop into one of Hitler's closest advisers and helpers, and into his most important image-maker within military society.

Through the Reich President as supreme commander, supreme command over all parts of the Reichswehr, the Reich Army and Reich Navy, had been transferred to him, which led to a special relationship with the Reich President: on the one hand, the minister in the military command structure was directly subordinate to the Reich President; on the other hand, as part of the government cabinet, he had to examine and countersign the military orders of the Reich President and assume political

responsibility for them.

In the first months after the seizure of power, Blomberg's participation in the Hitler government was still determined by the factor of the "partial identity of interests" between Reichswehr and National Socialism, and his view of Hitler — contrary to many presentations — was still determined by waiting skepticism. Nevertheless the Defense Minister proclaimed, and many agreed with him in this assessment, that the new regime was for him "the realization of that (...) which many of the best had been striving for for years." After the parade that took place on the occasion of his farewell from Königsberg, he said: even if the farewell from East Prussia was difficult for him, he had nevertheless "followed with joy the call of the General Field Marshal to enter the new cabinet, since this cabinet of national concentration embodies the longing of all national Germans."

Hitler did everything to lull the military men into the belief that their hopes for a renaissance of the military power of former days could be realized with him as Chancellor. In his government declaration he spoke of his "love for the army as bearer of our weapons and symbol of our great past," and prophesied a "cordial bond in the service of the people (...) between the NS Party (...) on the one hand and the officers and soldiers of the German Reich Army on the other."

Soon Hitler had to confront the skeptical army leadership with his promises. On the evening of 3 February 1933 the Chancellor presented himself to the group and military-district commanders in the house of the Chief of Army Command. Hitler had not looked forward without concern to this meeting, arranged by Blomberg, since he feared rejection by the traditional elite of the higher military men. He knew: without allies within the army structure, the process of the internal seizure of power by the National Socialists could not take place by legal means; against the army leadership he would not be able to gain power in the state. Many younger officers had indeed long since entertained great sympathies for Hitler; but they were not the ones whom he had to convince on this February day. It was the officers of Schlieffenian and Seecktian stamp who examined the "Bohemian corporal" with cool disdain. In his speech, which Hitler began uncertainly and which increased into a monologue excess of two hours, he expressed himself on the aims of his policy and sought to calm the military leadership with the assurance that the first priority in the state for him was the building-up of the Wehrmacht, and that in this, unlike in Italy, there would be "no entanglement of army and SA." He spoke further of the desired equality between Party and Wehrmacht, which was to remain "apolitical and above parties." With that Hitler aimed at one of the fundamental fears of the officer corps: the fear of too close entanglement in Party and day-to-day politics. Approval of Hitler's statements nevertheless remained cool. He had the feeling of having "spoken the whole time as if against a wall," even though he had evoked the image of a state resting on two equal pillars, Wehrmacht and Party.

If a positive surprise presented itself to Hitler on the side of the general officer corps, it was in the figure of the new Reichswehr Minister. In him Hitler was to find, for the realization of his military-political ideas, the almost ideal partner in character and intellectual structure. Blomberg was recognizably impressed by the "struggle against Versailles" promised by Hitler, the announced "equality of rights in Geneva," and the image of a "state resting on two pillars," army and Party.

Even if at first he approached the new Chancellor hesitantly, there grew in him the belief that with Hitler he could not only overcome the hopelessness that he had felt — intensified during the Geneva period — for the Wehrmacht and for himself personally; he also believed that he recognized in him the expected savior whom he had anticipated in thought for many years. Incidentally, many of his comrades had apparently not wanted to read the signs of the times when they believed in an alternative to cooperation between Reichswehr and National Socialists. The fact was that since the seizure of

power, the time of weak governments largely dependent on military power was over, and the era of the Reichswehr as a “state within the state” was largely at an end. Only cooperation with the new regime offered the possibility of influence by the army. During the war Blomberg in his notes repeatedly dealt with the tension between Hitler and the “reactionary” general officer corps — Hitler’s usage: generals = reactionaries, the author notes. Their “self-overestimation” and arrogance he described as “grotesque.” “Such,” he writes, “was a widespread vice; in bitter hours I sometimes called it a generals’ disease.”

The military-political course of the general in the first years of his ministry stood under the primacy of unchecked rearmament efforts. As the highest maxim of his military policy he postulated on 3 February 1933 “Wehrhaftmachung,” making the nation militarily capable. Already by 1 April 1930, for the first time, the mobilization-style transfer into a war structure had been prepared, with tripling of the seven infantry divisions of the 100,000-man army. This still corresponded to the thoughts of Seeckt, whose standpoint of a stepwise army build-up was represented by the majority of General Staff officers in the following years as well. After the National Socialists’ takeover of power, a series of innovations was introduced that went far beyond Seeckt’s planning. The Truppenamt received the order to prepare, as the peace establishment, the increase of army strength planned for mobilization case I to twenty-one divisions. That meant a modern army of 300,000 men with heavy artillery and tanks. But the question of the army’s final shape remained unresolved so long as the disarmament negotiations in Geneva were still pending.

Blomberg had, as delegate in Geneva, been sufficiently “bored,” as he himself expressed it, and as minister consciously began to work toward the failure of the Disarmament Conference. He provoked the end of the conference above all by creating the financial and political framework for a multi-year, unchecked rearmament, which, as Manfred Deist describes it, he was to administer and control in the following years. Against this background began Blomberg’s constant negotiations with Reichsbank director Hjalmar Schacht.

After taking office Blomberg appeared in Geneva self-confidently and certainly with an understandable feeling of triumph, and steered the tough negotiations in a different direction in his own sense. His first intervention in the German conduct of negotiations showed that he was prepared to accept international isolation and risk a collapse of the conference when he was confronted with decisions that substantively touched the future of the Wehrmacht. With that he shot far beyond Hitler’s tactics, determined by fear of sanctions; Hitler believed he could survive this first phase of rearmament through delaying negotiations, half-concessions, and at the same time sharpened and accelerated armament measures. Blomberg was against a political solution of the armaments question, showed restraint during the negotiations, and continued to provoke the failure of the conference. He sought to conceal the German rearmament programs from the conference participants.

The direction of the military-political course was clear: in a meeting of the Reich Cabinet on 8 February 1933, Hitler and Blomberg — contrary to other proposals — enforced the absolute priority of military rearmament in all economic-policy measures. The decision stated that in every case “first the needs of the Wehrmacht were to be satisfied, and then it should be examined how much means remained for civilian measures.” On 17 May 1933 Hitler, before the Reichstag in his first broad foreign-policy speech, hinted at the possible withdrawal of Germany from the League of Nations.

In his study of the policy of the Reichswehr leadership, Michael Geyer names as the decisive characteristic of the political decisions of the entire Reichswehr leadership after 1933 their “poverty.” And indeed: so long as the aim of rearmament was guaranteed, other — political — problems initially

seemed to play only a minor role for the new Reichswehr Minister. The functionalization of politics in the sense of rearmament determined his attitude. The Clausewitzian primacy of politics had been led ad absurdum. It was this combination of rigid military insistence on armament and the selective perception of political circumstances typical of Blomberg that in the first months led him and the Reichswehr toward his new alliance partner Hitler. For him, the only decisive factors were the assessment that Germany could not be defended with the presently existing military means, and the rearmament promised by Hitler and co-decided by Blomberg himself in a cabinet meeting on 4 April 1933, even if this rearmament was provisionally secured neither in content nor financially. Again and again he postulated the primacy of “our own needs,” meaning those of the Wehrmacht.

In an interview on 8 May 1933 he explained: “As is known, Germany was one of the countries that first introduced universal military service. The experience that we had with it was good. Universal military service proved itself not only from the military standpoint, but also as an important means of educating the people.” In view of the military-political situation in Europe he asked: “Where, then, do our own needs remain? Where the considerations for our special circumstances? This complete disregard of German interests is strange. It gives me cause to point out that the time of dictates is over today.”

His ideas about securing rearmament can be summarized as follows: he demanded German rearmament determined solely by internal interests. As security, he and Hitler offered bilateral alliances and understandings and sought an approach to France — partly through private channels, partly through old-style General Staff relations. Such offers, in view of the far-reaching German demands, fell on no fruitful ground, so that Blomberg ultimately returned to his maxim in the sense of the Reichswehr tradition, namely a closer military-political bond with the Soviet Union; though with the expansion into a “Eurasian bloc” that was to include France. The German Foreign Minister Konstantin Freiherr von Neurath, by contrast, advocated a combination of Germany, the Soviet Union, and Italy. Although Blomberg was also prepared for negotiations, for example when the standardization of Wehrmacht organization was concerned, he was not prepared to negotiate over the concrete determination of the organization.

The Disarmament Conference provisionally allowed no steps toward rearmament and was therefore boycotted by the German military delegation. On 13 May 1933 Blomberg again clarified his position, which he had already set out in the interview of 8 May: “standardization of army systems according to general principles, (...) qualitative equality of rights with quantitative restriction, if other states likewise disarmed.” Finally he asserted: “Do not shrink back before the danger of the failure of the conference, even if blame should unjustly be shoved onto us. The Reichstag forum should be exploited in order to enlighten the world about the true circumstances.”

The final failure of the conference came on 13 October 1933; on 14 October 1933 Germany withdrew from the Disarmament Conference and from the League of Nations. After the collapse of the Disarmament Conference in Geneva, unrest and armament fever prevailed everywhere in the world. The question that thus became ever clearer during the year 1933 was what the other powers would still just tolerate below the threshold of war and of the armaments race. Blomberg continued to attempt to conceal the German military programs and to avoid fixing the Wehrmacht to specific numbers, which cannot surprise one in view of the plans developed in the Reichswehr Ministry. In foreign policy he continued to represent his policy of free armament, limited only in individual fields according to alliance expectations.

That equality of rights and parity of security were a danger to the neighboring states he did not want to see — or could not see — and he assured that the Reichswehr had no aggressive intentions against

France and England. At the same time, rearmament was being pursued that was to make Germany ready for defense against the states France, England, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. One-sided rearmament according to German interests and military-political cooperation were not, in the eyes of the Reichswehr leadership, a contradiction. It would therefore be mistaken to see behind Blomberg's armaments policy a tactic aimed at war. Like many military men of his stamp and socialization, he moved in those years — which is difficult to understand from today's perspective — in the serious belief that such armament was, as “defensive armament,” vitally necessary for the state.

Blomberg, who later, in view of the Allied accusation that German armament had prepared war, rightly stated that “this cannot be denied,” summarized in his keyword-like notes on the years 1933 to 1938 what mattered to him: “Struggle for freedom in the forties, not two-front war (...). My Geneva experiences had taught me that it [rearmament] would never be granted from there. Danger of independent action clear. Avoid offensiveness as much as possible, for a war had to be fatal for us, as far as one could see into the future. Rearmament was security, not means for aggression.” Difficult to understand, but “the defensive army” and “defensive armament” were not propaganda slogans of the military men, but in the opinion of the generals real existing military parameters.

021

REICHENAU'S RULE IN THE MINISTERAMT

After Blomberg had been appointed Reichswehr Minister on 30 January 1933 and in May 1933 had also been entrusted by the Reich President with supreme command over the Wehrmacht, he could actively concern himself with creating a General Staff in his own sense.

In the course of a personnel policy aimed at removing the Schleicher clique from the corridors of the Bendlerblock, after taking office he replaced Colonel Ferdinand von Bredow as chief of the Ministeramt with his confidant, Colonel Reichenau. Reichenau came from East Prussia to Berlin in order, on 12 February 1934, to take over the leadership of the Ministeramt of the Reichswehr Ministry, once Schleicher's power center, which was now renamed the “Wehrmachtamt” and in the following years was continuously expanded with the distant aim of a centralized Wehrmacht leadership.

Reichenau was certainly no friend of desk work, but he was ambitious and power-hungry enough to recognize in the new task his great chance. He intended to develop the Ministeramt into a real High Command of the Wehrmacht and attacked the theoretical solution of reorganizing the wartime supreme command structure. During his period in office, decisive organizational changes were already put through which clearly aimed at the expansion of a Wehrmacht High Command such as would then emerge in 1938 from the Wehrmachtamt, directly subordinate to Hitler, with General Wilhelm Keitel as military staff and chef de bureau.

With the Wehrmachtamt, Blomberg created an umbrella organization over the branches of the Wehrmacht with its own operational command department — the “Department of National Defense” — which can be regarded as the first attempt at a Wehrmacht General Staff and was the command organ of the War Minister in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht. The Department of National Defense comprised officers from the army, navy, and — soon afterward — also air force, and served the purpose of handling operational and organizational tasks of the entire Wehrmacht as well as Blomberg's deployment instructions to army, navy, and air force. It was also responsible for the planning and conduct of Wehrmacht war games. From the Department of National Defense there arose,

at the outbreak of war in 1939, the “Wehrmacht Operations Staff” as Hitler’s operational advisory office.

As a second important measure in the course of building a central Wehrmacht leadership, the War Minister called into being, within the structures of the Wehrmachtamt, a Wehrmacht Armaments Office, Department of Defense Economy and Weapons Affairs, whose leadership he transferred to the previous chief of the Army Weapons Office, the then Colonel Georg Thomas. The Wehrmacht Armaments Office was entrusted with steering the defense-economic aspects of the new military-political course. Thus already at the end of 1934, in the form of the Wehrmachtamt, Blomberg possessed a staff that made possible for him the exercise of supreme command over the Wehrmacht.

In his function Reichenau possessed no authority of order or command over the Wehrmacht. Instructions and orders were issued solely by virtue of the command authority of the War Minister. Although Reichenau, as chief of the Wehrmachtamt, nevertheless undoubtedly had great influence on Blomberg as adviser, this influence must not be overestimated; and Klaus-Jürgen Müller’s dictum, according to which Blomberg possessed no military-political strategy of his own or reflected ideas about his procedure and always acted in accordance with Reichenau’s military-political conception, while Reichenau knew how to pull his minister like a marionette in the directions he desired, must be strongly qualified.

The thesis that Reichenau was the real ruler in the Reichswehr Ministry falls short, but it corresponds to the Blomberg image of the military historiography of the 1950s and 1960s, which continues to have an effect down to the present. Everything that Müller allows for Reichenau — the political tactic of “inserting oneself,” of “into the new state,” of tactically motivated concessions, indeed above all the “unconcerned throwing off of ballast that numerous of his comrades regarded as traditional values” — applies just as much to Blomberg. The strictly hierarchical thinking within the military circle must also not be disregarded in evaluating the relationship Reichenau–Blomberg. In an army built on the principle of command and obedience there is no structure running from below upward. Personality and charisma, brisk and loud behavior — both of which Reichenau unquestionably possessed more than the gentle and friendly-seeming Blomberg — cannot be equated with the authority and power of a military superior, provided that this superior, like his subordinate, was socialized under the effect of the magic of hierarchy, as Blomberg and Reichenau unquestionably were.

When Müller writes that, in contrast to Blomberg’s “merely emotional-believing devotion,” Reichenau recognized in National Socialism the “spirit of the age” and above all possessed a “tactically much more sensible, politically also more substantial, though quite reckless concept,” which is not further set out, he overlooks how closely Reichenau worked with and for Blomberg and executed his orders. This fact finds symbolic expression in the surviving Reichswehr Minister documents, the majority of which bear Reichenau’s signature — but with the addition “by order” and Blomberg’s own initials beside it.

Moreover, one must not, with a retrospective view of Schleicher’s rule as chief of the Ministeramt during the Weimar years, overestimate the influence in this position. Since then the power-political circumstances had changed in decisive fashion. It was Blomberg who on 1 February 1933 decided to make his faithful Reichenau head of the Ministeramt in the Reichswehr Ministry, and thus his cardinal in politicis, and thereby catapulted him into precisely that political key position in the Reichswehr Ministry in which a few years earlier Schleicher had maneuvered against him, Blomberg.

In the British Annual Report on the German Army of 1933 there is the following assessment of the tandem Blomberg-Reichenau: “They claim to be complementary and undoubtedly they work in the

closest harmony. General von Blomberg is a commander with considerable powers of decision and training, while von Reichenau is primarily a staff officer with gifts of organization and political and world sense. They have secured the confidence of the chancellor, so that the combination is likely to continue in force for some time.”

For Blomberg, Reichenau embodied the phenomenon of the new “political soldierdom,” which corresponded to his ideal. Thus he thought of Reichenau as having the task of gradually bringing the army closer to the regime and politicizing it in the sense of National Socialism. Reichenau understood the army’s policy of noninterference as a conscious option for Hitler and energetically supported Blomberg’s course. In this sense, on assuming office on 6 February, he had proclaimed: “Never was the Wehrmacht more identical with the state than today.” A few months later he had remarked to a comrade that with Hitler’s assumption of government a revolutionary confrontation of great magnitude had begun. Hitler was undoubtedly striving for legal dictatorship, and the Wehrmacht had to help him in this by trying to push back and paralyze Party-type influences on the part of the NSDAP.

The alleged Reichenau rule in the Reichswehr Ministry was already ended after two years, on 1 October 1935, when Reichenau was appointed lieutenant general and commanding general of VII Artillery Command in Munich. Blomberg did not do much to prevent this. Under the adaptable and Hitler-devoted Wilhelm Keitel as the new chief of the Wehrmachtamt, and his chief of the Department of National Defense, the then Colonel Alfred Jodl, the aim was intensified of developing the Reichswehr Ministry into a real War Ministry which would include the Luftwaffe, belonging to the Aviation Ministry, and create from the Department of National Defense a Wehrmacht General Staff.

022

THE “UNPOLITICAL” REICHSWEHR IS BURIED (1933/34)

In his inaugural decree Blomberg spoke of the “Reichswehr as the supra-party instrument of power of the state,” which he wanted to preserve as such, and even at the end of February 1933, on a journey through the military districts, he spoke in his speeches against the demands and extremism of the Party, while he supported the new, genuinely “national” regime. For him it was true that a “sinking down into a party troop” would in every case have broken the foundations of the army.

If his first announcements still postulate strict supra-partisanship, this may also indicate that, despite the ambivalent attitude of the officer corps toward National Socialism, he believed that this supra-partisanship of the military could be realized. Perhaps he also merely wanted to calm the officer corps, for his practical policy from the beginning of his ministerial period was in no way impartial and neutral, and the course of the Reichswehr Minister led already in the first two years of the regime to the gradual self-disempowerment of the armed forces.

Already when, in the first cabinet meeting on 31 January 1933, the problem of a general strike and of the state of emergency was discussed, this tendency became apparent. Blomberg, disregarding the executive power of the Reich President laid down in the Weimar Constitution, immediately conceded to the Reich Chancellor the use of the Party organization instead of the Reichswehr internally, by remarking “that the soldier is inclined to regard an external enemy as the only possible opponent.” This remark stood in contradiction to the oath of the Reichswehr, in which it says “to protect the German Reich and its lawful institutions.” Blomberg entrenched himself behind the completely nonfunctional shell of the Seecktian dogma of the “unpolitical attitude of the soldier,” which in the period of the

Weimar Republic had already represented a politically problematic inner reservation. The “hovering above politics,” as Seeckt had once demanded it of his Reichswehr, had — as shown — intensified a dangerous apolitical mentality and decisively prepared precisely the close entanglement of the Reichswehr in politics after 1933.

Blomberg had entirely grasped this and had himself experienced it in the Weimar years. In a commanders’ conference on 1 June 1933 he said: “This being unpolitical never meant that we were in agreement with the system of the former government; it was rather a means of protecting us from too close an entanglement in this system.” He wanted to retain this. The depoliticization, however, as Blomberg understood it in Hitler’s sense, amounted to a promise of noninterference by the armed forces in the domestic-political confrontation and to a “policy of support” for the National Socialists. Even “not interfering” was not much more than the purely rhetorical camouflage of an active policy of support for Hitler. The Reichswehr Minister must have been aware that the maxim he proclaimed of the army “holding itself out” under the conditions of a developing totalitarian dictatorship amounted to a one-sided option for this system. The “unpolitical attitude” of the soldier, as Blomberg postulated it, was no more than a farce which under the real political circumstances no longer had any meaning. The maxim of the unpolitical, which once stood in harmony with Prussian military traditions and the aristocratic concept of estate, received under the conditions of the new regime a completely changed — indeed contrary — connotation. It was precisely the restriction of the armed forces to national defense that Hitler needed for the establishment of a totalitarian system.

At that commanders’ conference in June 1933 Blomberg then explicitly threw overboard the maxim of the “unpolitical Reichswehr” and declared that now being unpolitical was over, and only one thing remained: “to serve the National Socialist movement with full devotion.” Toward Hitler he emphasized that the Reichswehr had absolute trust in him, that it was unreservedly reliable and ready “to live, work, and, if necessary, die in this newly formed and newly blood-filled Reich.”

On 15 September, before officers of the 6th Division after the conclusion of the autumn exercises, he declared that the “seizure of power by the national government” involved “a fundamental reshaping of opinion and will of the whole people and the realization of a new worldview.” The “old, liberal principle of the predominant freedom of the individual” was no longer authoritative; rather, what now applied was “the word of the totality of the state, which reaches into the most personal things of the individual.” But this logically also implied the total inclusion of the armed forces.

Blomberg’s speech before the 6th Division, which can certainly be interpreted as a turning point in the general’s defense policy, shows how the minister, in pursuit of his tactic of adaptation and embrace, attempted to claim National Socialist ideology, and above all its chief representative, for the Reichswehr. From now on Blomberg took the path that was to politicize members of the Reichswehr in the sense of the National Socialist worldview. “The National Socialist assumption of power” meant for him “far more than only a change of government”; it is “rather a fundamental change in the thinking and willing of the whole people and the realization of a new philosophy.” He went on to state that in the National Socialist worldview there existed a deep “agreement with the best principles of German soldierdom.” Therefore it was self-evident that one “fully says yes to this transformation of soldierdom inside and outside the army, but especially in the Wehrmacht. For the leadership of the Wehrmacht this has become all the easier since we soldiers are all bound to the man who has borne, developed, and led these doctrines by an especially soldierly relationship.”

It remains to ask whether Blomberg in the first years of his term of office really had a conception of Hitler’s total claim to power and clearly grasped it. On 1 June 1933, before the commanders, he had

remarked in this connection that it would be fortunate if the movement of the NSDAP soon came to the totality it was striving for and if the German Nationals and the Center disappeared. To conclude from these words that he wanted to recognize the totality-claim of a party would be mistaken. Blomberg affirmed the “totality of the new state” and the “realization of a new worldview,” which in his view was taking place in this new state. Thus the affirmation of the new statehood simultaneously contained a certain distancing from the Party apparatus. Blomberg’s distance from Hitler’s conservative coalition partners, the natural political allies of the Reichswehr, also shows how much his and Reichenau’s “policy of noninterference” meant a scarcely concealed promotion of the Hitler movement, though at the same time it also weakened the position of the Reichswehr.

The War Minister believed in the effectiveness of the “two-pillar theory,” which, however, was already problematic — indeed fragile and illusory — because the Party, as the sole bearer of political will, as Hitler had expressed it, ultimately had to gain absolute primacy after all. The weight of the “Wehrmacht pillar” was much less than Blomberg wanted to admit, and the two-pillar theory was ambiguous and had exclusively tactical-propagandistic character. Blomberg was convinced that with his military-political course and his power he could help the Reichswehr to greater prestige and influence in the new state. In particular he believed that he was directly supporting the construction of a system which, according to his military-political ideas and experiences, would best satisfy the interests of the army. For him the points of political development were not set in the direction of a totalitarian system of rule in which the army too would be disempowered; rather, he believed in the development of a long-term ideal condition of the “unity” between army and state repeatedly invoked in his speeches, decrees, and notes, whatever he may have imagined under this. In doing so he blocked out disturbing factors.

Out of this selective perception he believed that he could describe as a “success of his policy” the fact that the Reichswehr had not been coordinated. Rather, as he believed, in close personal connection to the Chancellor “borne by a broad national movement,” it would be a respected and powerful support of the new authoritarian state. In this sense, in Hitler’s presence in Ulm at the conclusion of the autumn maneuvers on 6 September 1933, he said that the Reich Chancellor and leader of the German people had assigned to the Reichswehr “in the new Reich the place that belongs to it.” He had given the army back the glorious old flags and the black-white-red cockade; therefore it gave him “its fullest trust, unreserved reliability, and unshakable devotion.”

The Reichswehr as the noblest and most reliable bearer of the new state, loyally and gratefully devoted to the authoritarian leader of the Reich — that was what Blomberg wanted to see, and he acted accordingly. That he succumbed to this false conclusion was certainly also grounded in the generally prevailing acceptance of National Socialism within society: Blomberg had learned to believe in power and to subordinate himself to it where it showed itself. A further cause of Blomberg’s error is to be sought in the fact that Hitler eagerly encouraged his War Minister’s illusion. In September 1933 he said: “We can assure you [Blomberg] that we see in you the bearer of the tradition of our glorious old army, and that with all our hearts and with all that we are capable of, we will stand up for the spirit of this army.” On the first anniversary of the seizure of power, 30 January 1934, he spoke of the cordial bond between the forces of the revolution and the responsible leaders of a Wehrmacht disciplined to the utmost. For Blomberg the Reichswehr was not isolated, neutralized, threatened by moral entanglement and disempowerment, but elevated and honored.

THE “RULER OF SOULS”

In 1933 Hitler had a broad following across all strata of the population. Many, too, who did not understand themselves as National Socialists were fascinated by the aura surrounding him — difficult to grasp today. The British Hitler biographer Ian Kershaw attributes fundamental importance to this circumstance. “Without Hitler’s extraordinary popularity,” according to Kershaw, “the high degree of general approval on which the regime could repeatedly draw would be unthinkable.” The Führer cult, the Hitler myth, is the central element of Adolf Hitler’s “charismatic rule” in Max Weber’s sense. The mysteriousness and the incomprehensible element lying in this pseudo-religious cult around Hitler has been much discussed and yet, from the reflective-analytical perspective of the historian, is never entirely understandable. Even biographical engagement with Hitler’s personality could not explain his extraordinary power of attraction. Therefore it is important to seek the causes of the Hitler myth also in those who admired Hitler. While this has been done in outline — for example in a methodologically and analytically successful group-biographical study by Michael Wildt — for individual collectives of the society of the Third Reich, no study yet exists that investigates the acceptance of Hitler as bearer of charisma in the ranks of the officer corps, or the significance of National Socialism as a political religion within military society.

Even if the present biography cannot answer these questions with general validity, the person of Blomberg can nevertheless show the charismatic effect of Hitler, also on the higher officer corps, in an almost ideal-typical case.

Werner von Blomberg was, as has been shown, an educated and highly gifted officer; a “man of will,” whose life in many stations corresponded to the generation-specific normal course of his estate. Nevertheless, for him the metamorphosis into Hitler’s “vassal” — this should be explicitly emphasized once again — certainly did not have its roots in political agreement with National Socialism, not in a “partial identity of interests,” nor did it result from purely purpose-oriented considerations of an ambitious professional officer. Rather, he experienced the “arrival” of Hitler as that of the long-awaited savior, who could free Germany and the military from the traumatic experiences of the Versailles Treaty and the Weimar Republic, from a present perceived as a threat, and could lead them upward to new greatness.

The Party Rally of Victory, the first Reich Party Rally of the NSDAP in Nuremberg from 30 August to 3 September 1933, had a catalytic function in connection with the spell that Hitler had begun to exercise over Blomberg. Shortly after the event, in a speech, he gave expression to the collective Hitler enthusiasm then prevailing: “All are deeply moved by the force that he [Hitler, the author notes] radiates. Whoever experienced him in Nuremberg at the Party Rally (...), in what way the full devotion of the people flamed upward and how impulsively the soldiers too cheered him where they were not prevented by our military forms, felt something of the force that this man radiates.” In these words is reflected the beginning metamorphosis of the general into a believing follower of the “savior” Hitler — in Klaus-Jürgen Müller’s assessment, in Blomberg’s case an “emotional credulity arising from psychic instability.” The phenomenon of the “savior myth” and of belief in Hitler as a kind of religious leader is documented by numerous passages in Blomberg’s memoirs, in which he makes use of pseudo-religious terminology: “Since 1919 compromises had not brought us forward. The German people waited for a turn — Hitler could enter an emptied space (...).” An “emptied space” implies a preceding inner emptiness, which is indeed found in Blomberg’s biography in the years before the seizure of power. He continues: “I found in Hitler and his aims everything that could not be found in the interregnum. The longed-for miracle seemed to have occurred; the ebb turned to flood. What I believed I could no longer find in 1919 fell into my lap overnight: first, faith, reverence for a man, full assent to an idea; then a

great sphere of activity pointing into the future.” A guiding thought in his assent to Hitler was the all-dominating topos of “unity,” of which Blomberg dreamed. In Russia he believed he had seen this ideal of a unity between people, army, and state. For him Hitler was “the victor in the struggle for the nation.” He wanted “to serve him with full devotion,” entirely according to the premises of his deeply internalized image of the soldier and his enthusiasm for what was genuinely new and revolutionary. In Hitler he believed he recognized the guarantor for the realization of his ideals, and thereby made himself the believing ally of his later gravediggers.

Blomberg’s long search for meaning — the collective illness of his generation — culminated in a climax. In Hitler he found what he had sought: the Commander Psychologos, the charismatic ruler of souls. Hitler was “the man of fate,” the “savior,” the “redeemer.” Against this background, the statement transmitted by Rudolf Diels that Hitler affected Blomberg “like a great physician” appears entirely credible.

Already in a description of his second encounter with Hitler, on the day of the seizure of power in the Hotel Kaiserhof, Blomberg once again supplies an example of Hitler’s uncanny suggestiveness: “I was with him for an hour. For the first time I was exposed to the overwhelmingly strong influence of his personality. (...) Hitler stood out in such measure from his Party men and from the ministerial surroundings that trust in him arose as a natural, indeed as an important source of strength [...]. So long as I remained near him, that is, until January 1938, his suggestive force worked on me by calling upon me to switch off my doubts and objections, and at the same time understood how to keep my completely loyal attitude alive despite temptations. I formed trust in him; he, too, apparently in me.”

In descriptions of Hitler’s physiognomy, his fascinating eyes are usually emphasized as a characteristic feature. Blomberg too dealt with the dictator’s face and wrote that Hitler possessed large, expressive eyes that dominated his face, which however had appeared indistinct to him. This statement of Blomberg’s can be interpreted as an unconscious admission of a loss of judgment and sense of reality. Reality blurred, became “indistinct.” Blomberg did not intuitively succeed in seeing Hitler clearly — in recognizing him. Although psychological factors are quite useful as an explanation for Blomberg’s motives for action, they should not be overemphasized. To trace Hitler’s strong suggestive effect on the general back to a father complex falls short and would obscure aspects present in the relationship between general and “Führer,” such as career ambition, consciousness of power, and one-sided military orientation.

Illuminating in this connection is the assessment of the then German ambassador in Italy, Ulrich von Hassell, who after a lengthy discussion with Blomberg in Nuremberg in 1934 confided to his diary that the general stood “under a kind of hypnosis toward Hitler.” This hypnosis, Hassell thought, was to be explained by three circumstances: “first [by] the fact that Bl[omberg] does not possess very great general education, indeed is very strongly ‘only a soldier’; second, by a certain softness of character disposition; third, by Hitler’s extraordinary enthusiasm for the Wehrmacht, which guaranteed to it, and thus to its Commander-in-Chief, developmental possibilities of a uniquely outstanding kind. The undeniable necessity for the holder of Bl[omberg]’s position to subordinate all points of view to that of building the Wehrmacht, and the fact that in this he enjoyed H[itler]’s full confidence and absolutely had to preserve it, explains to a high degree the slight power of resistance that Bl[omberg] opposed to measures of the regime in other fields, which he certainly did not approve and whose great and dangerous significance he could not fail to recognize.”

While Hassell’s analysis is essentially accurate, his verdict on Blomberg’s “lack of general education” in no way corresponds to the common characterization of the general as “unusually educated.” Whether

this points to an especially high intellectual standard on the ambassador's part, or to a low one among those who considered Blomberg educated, remains uncertain. Hassell's statement shows, however, how ambivalently Blomberg was already perceived by contemporaries.

The realization and visible implementation of a new "philosophy" within the military became the most urgent aim of Blomberg's military policy down to 1937. What exactly he understood by this "new philosophy" remains just as unclear in his notes as his definition of the "National Socialist movement" and "worldview." He avoids concepts that are politically connoted and therefore demand semantic sharpness — a verbal "committing oneself." What is certain is that he differentiated "movement" and "Party"; he also understood by "movement" more than simply the Hitler government. As is shown in his reflections on the NS Party and Hitler's paladins — the "capitanos," as he called them — he simply blocked out the shadow sides of National Socialism embodied in them from his point of view: "From the beginning of his contact with Hitler," according to his own statement, he was "astonished and frightened by the men and their character, who formed his closest human circle and, beyond that, the framework of his Party. These men (...) formed a revolutionary intermediate stratum, in which idealism and greedy realism had entered into a strange mixture. The agreement in bodily type, which was not appealing, was striking."

To the question he posed himself, "What about the Party?" he answered in retrospect: "Switch off doubts and objections! Hitler alone counts. The relationship to the Party had to arise as the relationship to Hitler — one had to put up with it. It seemed to me that Hitler embodied the National Socialist idea (...). The Party was nothing desirable to me (...). Within the Party there was irresponsible talk about conquest. (...) We soldiers did not take the chatter seriously." "Hitler stood on our side in my time." Goebbels too disapprovingly perceived this inner distance of the new Defense Minister from the National Socialist Party. He sensed that Blomberg was by no means an unconditional NS adherent and mistrustfully waited for his profession of loyalty to the Party. Against this background Faber du Faur's judgment appears probable: that Blomberg was "of a mimosa-like sensitivity" "when he was touched by things that demanded more of him than only faith in the Führer." Blomberg saw no contradiction in rejecting the Party and its brown capitanos while at the same time understanding himself as Hitler's ally. It was a prevailing phenomenon in National Socialism to distinguish Party and Hitler.

Blomberg saw the guarantee of the army's sovereignty in a personal relationship of trust with Hitler. The concept of "trust" was of central importance for him and runs like a red thread through his notes, speeches, and decrees. This thinking, fixed exclusively on Hitler, nevertheless misrecognized the true power relations in the Third Reich. Hitler's rule, as is well known, rested not only on his personal charisma; it was inseparably connected with the different and often opposed currents of the Party's institutions.

Moreover, Blomberg completely overestimated his influence on the dictator. During a state visit to London in May 1937 he told a British officer of his absolutely privileged access to "Herr Hitler," whom he could seek out at any time of day or night and in any place, and who almost always accepted his advice. From the post eventum perspective, the general emphasized that over the course of the years there had also been several differences of opinion and discussions between him and the dictator, especially on SA questions. According to his own recollection, between 1933 and 1938 Blomberg had "often enough raised objection [against Hitler, the author notes], several times in lively collision" with Hitler. Despite these alleged differences of opinion between Reich Chancellor and Reichswehr Minister, Blomberg saw himself confronted by the omnipresent accusation of "servility to Hitler." In conversation, the noble, reserved Blomberg, until his fall in 1938, had been spared Hitler's hysterical outbursts of rage, and Hitler remained friendly toward him to the end, "with Austrian charm," obliging

and “full of agreement,” according to Blomberg. Blomberg himself contradicts this assertion of his “influence” on Hitler when he writes in his memoirs that it “usually nevertheless came to a withdrawal” of the “objection,” for “Hitler was too strong.”

Only when a disillusioned Blomberg after the war and during his imprisonment began personally to demask Hitler did the image of the former confidant crumble, and in his notes bitterness and disappointment toward Hitler are audible: “Hitler recognized no collaborators of equal rank, at least not for long. He could conceal this circumstance through a considerate, even friendly manner, as happened to me personally.”

And Hitler? Although he was always filled by deep mistrust toward people who came from the old Prussian tradition, he had in his own way actually formed a kind of trust in his Defense Minister. One of the causes of this trust was his firm belief that it was due to Blomberg that on the night before 30 January 1933 the feared Reichswehr putsch had not occurred.

Hitler knew very precisely what he owed Blomberg and saw in him a powerful ally. Blomberg’s significance as an instance of legitimation for his rule was fundamental, and the bond with the Defense Minister was, for the dictator, equivalent to a close bond with the Reichswehr, which symbolized the past and occupied a decisive key position in his concept of conquering power. Since his relationship to the army was always tense, Hitler needed Blomberg in the years of the consolidation of National Socialist power as a link to the Reichswehr and as an instrument to coordinate and control military power. It was important for him that Blomberg, like Hindenburg, as a bearer of the “old order,” had an important integrative function in the establishment and staging of the Führer cult. This is not to imply that he conceptually planned the creation of this cult, at least not in the first years of his rule; rather, he intuitively grasped which factors helped shape his rule and used them skillfully. Gerhard Ritter rightly states that Hitler had “an improbably great piece of luck” with Blomberg and that “no personality could have been better suited to maintain the outward appearance of unchanged independence of the Reichswehr and yet to make it, in scarcely perceptible stages, into a will-less instrument than precisely this Defense Minister from the school of the old imperial General Staff.” The dictator knew this and in 1938 was to withdraw his trust from his War Minister only reluctantly and with mixed feelings in view of sole military responsibility.

Hitler also possessed an unfailing instinct for whom he could trust and whom he could not. He could trust Blomberg; he was “a true and noble friend.” Thus he allowed him to come very close to him also in the private sphere and did everything to reward the Defense Minister for his loyalty. “Whoever observed Hitler’s overflowing and respectful amiability, his effort at knightly behavior toward Blomberg in those months, could put himself into the soul of the good-natured soldier Blomberg. He looked into a brilliant future.” The professional future of Blomberg, still deeply disillusioned on 29 January and promoted to general on the historic 30 January 1933, did indeed become brilliant: on 30 August 1933 he was appointed colonel general, and on Hitler’s birthday, 20 April 1936, General Field Marshal.

As one of the closest confidants, Blomberg was often a guest in Hitler’s “private sanctuary,” his house on the Obersalzberg. He belonged to the few people who experienced Hitler’s lover Eva Braun in the dictator’s circle, and he possessed excellent detailed knowledge of Hitler’s habits of life. In his notes he reports: “Hitler had not married, but he needed women. He once spoke confidentially to me of this side of his life (...).” Blomberg by no means had understanding for all of his “Führer’s” habits. As his Luftwaffe adjutant Karl Boehm-Tettelbach also confirms in his memoirs, Blomberg had to take part at Hitler’s Berghof in film showings that filled whole evenings, including Rühmann films. Unlike Hitler,

these do not seem to have suited his taste. He writes: “His [Hitler’s, the author notes] preference for film astonished me again and again. He was capable of watching one or two films every evening. Perhaps he needed this flickering diversion, but I found this pleasure or habit strange.” Blomberg’s youngest daughter Dorothee, who had accompanied her father to the Obersalzberg, likewise remembered the peculiar society she found there. This “mixture of men’s association and officers’ mess” represented a world of its own. Blomberg himself bought a Bavarian-style house in Bad Wiessee on the Tegernsee in 1934 and named it, perhaps in imitation of Hitler’s estate, Berghaus.

The visits to the Obersalzberg in the years 1933 to 1937, which ceased only when Hitler withdrew his trust from his generalissimo, show the extent of the close personal bond between Defense Minister and “Führer.” The tea hours and walks in Hitler’s customary surroundings corresponded to his chaotic, planless governmental style, ruled by moods, to his tendency toward secrecy and his preference for individual conversations with subordinates whom he could easily dominate. Blomberg remembered this kind of “conversation” that he conducted with Hitler on the Obersalzberg: “In conversation as two or three, he actually always spoke in monologues.” Hitler valued finding in Blomberg not only a military expert, but also a conversation partner educated in literature and philosophy, who in addition, with his calm, composed manner, understood patient listening. Listening was something that Hitler absolutely expected from his confidants, for he alone stood at the center of his fantasies of power and greatness. The obligatory walks followed a canonized pattern: they always led downhill; at the foot of the mountain a car waited to bring Hitler and his respective companion back up again. Because of the numerous onlookers, the whole area was often cordoned off during such afternoon walks. As compensation, the march-past of visitors who had traveled from all parts of Germany became customary: a kind of religious rite that made an uncanny impression on Blomberg, in which he could marvel at the worshipers of the “Führer” who had made pilgrimage to the Obersalzberg and who, after waiting for hours and following the sign of an adjutant, were allowed to march silently — like a procession — in a long row past Hitler.

024

TIME OF INDOCTRINATION

Blomberg sealed his pact with Hitler through his military policy, which he accentuated by shifting from silent and benevolent neutrality to indirect support of the Hitler movement. With an “opening policy” and “embrace tactic,” he set about actively adapting, step by step and on his own initiative, that area of the army which had so far been excluded from coordination and revolutionizing by the NSDAP to the new circumstances. He himself wanted to have the necessary measures carried out, which he saw as the logical consequence of his partnership policy. In this way he believed he could achieve direct influence on Hitler. The “opening policy” of the Reichswehr leadership, however, irrespective of its different motivation, was to contribute to the inner decomposition of the army. Quite deliberately and massively, Blomberg, and under him the new staff of the Reichswehr leadership, pursued in the first year and a half of the new government an increasingly strong policy of “opening” and adaptation, in order to change the image of the Wehrmacht in Hitler’s sense in the area of political information and schooling and in the area of personnel policy. The “indoctrination efforts” began on 19 April 1933 with the introduction of the duty to salute, the German greeting, between Wehrmacht and police, which from 22 May also applied between the Wehrmacht and the formations of the SA, SS, and Stahlhelm. On 19 September 1933 Blomberg then also ordered the greeting “Sieg Heil” for members of the Reichswehr. That Blomberg in fact saw in this far more than a mere tactic of adaptation to the Hitler regime he still confessed in 1944 in Wiessee exile. In his notes he describes the persecution of those in the Wiessee

town hall, mostly spa guests, who in their letters to the municipal administration had used, as a closing formula, instead of “Heil Hitler,” the words “With German greeting,” or even “respectfully” or “devotedly”: “They were reported to the local groups of the Party in their home towns, so that these evildoers would be monitored!! The expression ‘Heil Hitler’ had been a battle cry and sign of recognition. Then it had been made into the conventional closing formula and everyday greeting. All upright profession of faith was thereby taken from it. If one now wanted to push through the use of H.H. [Heil Hitler, the author notes] with coercive measures, then every value and every magical force of this battle cry [emphasis by the author] would be lost. That would be a pity!”

In May 1933 a decree by Blomberg followed on the “Behavior of the Wehrmacht toward national associations,” in which he ordered that soldiers who took part in demonstrations of such associations “must clearly show by their conduct that they go along with the national movement.” He was now also ready to include the NSDAP as such in his concept. A further attempt by the Reichswehr Ministry to influence the Reichswehr politically took place in July 1933 through permission to hang announcements of the Party as well as advertising posters for Party literature in the service rooms of the Reichswehr. Subsequently the Reichswehr Ministry gave the technical schools of the Reichswehr the assignment to introduce national-political instruction for the school year 1933–34. National-political instruction and the education of the soldiers would remain, until his departure from the army in 1938, a central component of the military policy of the former Chief of the Truppenamt.

Just as the Reichswehr leadership had de facto given up its neutral attitude toward the other parties and Hitler’s coalition partners, so too it wanted to give up the neutrality of the inner attitude of the armed forces. Since the Seeckt era the principle had held that the Reichswehr served the state alone, the authority of the state “above parties and governments.” Blomberg now swung radically to the other extreme: the Reichswehr was now to serve “the National Socialist movement” — not, say, the “national government” led by a National Socialist Reich Chancellor. This formulation characterizes Blomberg’s will to enforce his military-political concept of an army as the chief power factor in Hitler’s dictatorship, among other things by having it open itself ideologically to National Socialism. The opening policy of the Reichswehr leadership went hand in hand with making Wehrmacht-internal events transparent to the Party, which served to rebut the accusations of Party and SA that the army lacked a National Socialist attitude. This policy was characterized on the one hand by the effort to win the officer corps — whose ambivalence toward National Socialism was fully recognized in the ministry — for Hitler’s new state by means of emphatic indoctrination, and thus, as it were, to create the prerequisites for the success of the course that had been adopted. On the other hand it was characterized by the attempt to usurp, as it were, the new “worldview” for the Reichswehr by demonstratively emphasizing its fundamental ideological agreement with the soldierly basic convictions of the armed forces. This tendency was henceforth reflected in all relevant decrees of the Reichswehr Ministry and its subordinate command authorities. The latter point was emphasized ever more strongly the more the conflict with the SA, smoldering since late summer 1933, intensified around the turn of the year 1933–34.

There is no doubt that this opening policy of the Reichswehr leadership cannot be interpreted separately from the growing competitive relationship between Reichswehr and SA. There is no consensus in research over the question whether the real driving force of Blomberg’s indoctrination policy is to be sought in its tactical component directed against the SA, and whether this policy was less a strategy directed toward acceptance of the “Party” than one aimed at weakening the SA. It must be stated that the conflict between Reichswehr and SA intensified Blomberg’s indoctrination policy, but it certainly did not create it; for in principle it lay along the line of the Reichswehr leadership’s course directed toward gaining an influential position, and it corresponded to Blomberg’s attitude toward

Hitler.

What took place under the aegis of Blomberg and Reichenau was, as it were, the attempt at a reeducation from the “unpolitical soldier” to a military dominated by the “National Socialist spirit.” From 1934 onward, in officers’ clubs there hung not only pictures of the War Minister and of the deceased General Field Marshal von Hindenburg, but also pictures of the “Führer.” In cooperation with the Propaganda Ministry, the Reichswehr Ministry formulated, as an instrument of indoctrination and education of the soldiers, a kind of “manifesto of agreement” between Wehrmacht and Party, which was equivalent to a timetable for all military propaganda down to 1938. In this, Blomberg was especially active in directing the publication and distribution of certain books and writings in the military establishment. Among the measures of the Reichswehr Ministry was, for example, the holding of a writing competition for young officers. In essays these were to depict the everyday life of the soldier in the service of the “völkisch state.” The best essay was to be, and was, published in a collected volume of the Reichswehr Ministry called *Weapon-Bearers of the Nation*, 1934.

Military journalism too reported accordingly: on 29 November 1933 the journal *Deutsche Wehr* printed a large-scale leading article on the “Wehrmacht in the Third Reich” and emphasized Blomberg’s agreement with National Socialism as well as the basic agreement between the worldview of the “movement” and that of the soldiers.

One day later Goebbels presented the first lecture of a “long-term lecture series” planned jointly with the Wehr Ministry, which began at the start of 1934 and had as its subject a fundamental definition of the relationship between Wehrmacht and National Socialism. In the individual lectures, key concepts of the common “manifesto,” phrases of National Socialism, were explained: front-fighterhood, sacrificial death, Versailles as collective trauma of the nation, de-individualization of the individual, brotherhood, people and Fatherland. Already at the end of the year 1933 Blomberg could, in *Deutsche Wehr*, contentedly summarize the positive effect of the targeted propaganda within the officer corps and define the “role of the Wehrmacht in the year 1933,” in which he once more set out his vision of unity between Wehrmacht, state, and people.

The perception of the Reichswehr by the public at home and abroad had to be manipulated in the sense of unity between army and state. In this sense the Reichswehr demonstratively and in a media-effective way engaged itself for the Winter Relief Organization and for children’s feeding programs. The manipulation of the image of the military in the public sphere became especially clear before and during the Olympic Games in Germany in 1936. Not only was a military demonstration of power par excellence delivered during the Games; Blomberg had also, in several decrees and orders to the Wehrmacht before the beginning of the Olympic Games, not merely made specifications about how military facilities and information were to be screened off, but also about what impressions of the Wehrmacht were to be awakened among the crowds of domestic and foreign tourists. The aim was to project an image of a Wehrmacht that was “united in Hitler’s will.”

The War Minister’s adaptation efforts also came to expression visually. Since 1919 he had criticized the appearance of the Reichswehr uniform. In February 1934 he now had it modified. On Blomberg’s proposal Hindenburg had issued a decree providing that the soldiers would from then on wear the National Socialist emblem — stylized eagle with swastika — on the uniform. Thus there occurred the highly dubious “nationalization of a party symbol.” The state cockade on the service cap of the army was likewise replaced by the emblem of the NSDAP, and on the steel helmet there was attached on the right side the shield with the Reich colors black-white-red, and on the left the emblem, in the army in white, in the navy in golden-yellow form. In these measures one had to see far more than an outward

matter, and the acceptance of such Party symbols in the military circle meant the visual manifestation of the army's political involvement. The official *Militär-Wochenblatt* justified the cosmetic alteration of the uniform by saying that the wearing of the Party symbol outwardly expressed what the Wehrmacht had always striven for: to be "weapon-bearer of a closed, national people." When members of the NSDAP demanded that within the Reichswehr further National Socialist orders and badges, such as the honor badge of the NSDAP and the Blood Order of 9 November 1923, should be worn publicly, Blomberg nevertheless refused this.

On that 2 February 1934, when Blomberg had ordered the wearing of the National Socialist emblem, he also informed the commanders of the military districts of the forthcoming issuance of the so-called "Aryan decree" for the officer corps. After he had already, on 8 December 1933, forbidden soldiers to visit Jewish establishments, he now, with the introduction of the decree on 28 February 1934, directed the indoctrination efforts — which for him were at the same time a sign of the Reichswehr's loyalty toward Hitler and a tactical move in the domestic-political power struggle with the SA — in a morally and politically consequential direction. The application of the Aryan Paragraph was a first high point in Blomberg's stepwise opening policy toward the NSDAP. It resulted in a comprehensive personnel-political purge, in the course of which about seventy "non-Aryan" officers, noncommissioned officers, and soldiers were dismissed from the Reichswehr. It meant nothing less than "for the first time the direct transfer of a typically National Socialist principle, the racial principle, into the area of personnel leadership which had until then been jealously guarded as the autonomous domain of military leadership, and which had until then been determined by the sacred principles of Prussian military tradition." One may rightly ask whether, with the introduction of the Aryan Paragraph, the basis was not created for a potentiation of collective prejudices against certain peoples and cultures in the army, which prepared the nourishing ground for the involvement of parts of the Wehrmacht in criminal acts of war in the Second World War.

At this point Blomberg's relationship to his Jewish fellow human beings should be sketched. In the memoirs he does not explicitly address his attitude toward Judaism. Nevertheless, his transmitted impressions of the New York Jews whom he came to know during his journey to the USA in 1931, as well as his close friendship with his first naval adjutant, the later Commander-in-Chief of the Kriegsmarine Hans Georg von Friedeburg, who according to National Socialist terminology was a "Mischling of the second degree," allow the conclusion that he was not an antisemite. And yet he began, especially after the Röhm crisis, to make concessions to Hitler's racial policy. The first took the form of his order excluding non-Aryans from military service in the Wehrmacht. Shortly afterward he gave the members of the Wehrmacht the instruction not to buy in Jewish shops. On the basis of the existing sources it cannot be clarified to what extent Blomberg knew of crimes against Jews. What is certain is that the Reichswehr silently watched the excesses against Jewish Germans. When Blomberg in May 1937 took part as German delegate in the coronation festivities for George VI in London, he remarked to his British escort officer that the British idea of the treatment of Jewish and non-National Socialist-thinking people in Germany was a result of the measureless exaggerations of the British press. He explained that the "Jewish problem" in Germany differed greatly from that in Great Britain, since in Germany "Jews of a more inferior type" predominated, and he added that the English should not believe that, merely because many Jews had had to leave Germany, they would not — once order had returned there — be allowed to come back, though on the terms of the Germans. He explained to the Briton that a large number of the social problems in the Weimar period had been caused, or "instigated," by the Jews, and thus, although in fact many innocents had suffered with the guilty, it therefore appeared very appropriate "to cut away a lot of flesh." Blomberg finally claimed that England would, at the "right time," experience a "democratized Third Reich" with a reintegration of the Jews as "German citizens."

Blomberg reacted with shock and deepest surprise when, after the end of the war, he learned of the existence of the extermination camps and the cruel and insane excesses of Hitler's genocide. His disappearance from the military-political stage in the year 1938 excludes participation in the planning of the Holocaust. One cannot, however, avoid a moral evaluation of his knowledge of anti-Jewish actions, his assent to the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, his promotion of those laws within the Wehrmacht, and his approving acceptance of Hitler's burning hatred of Jews.

Since 1934 the Wehrmachtamt had published Important Political Orders of the Reich War Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht. The sixty-page brochure of the 1935 edition set up guidelines for the political conduct of soldiers and contains, in fifty-one more or less important points, the War Minister's conception of the new "political" soldier. The guidelines, which from mid-October 1935 were distributed in the military districts in order to "ease the daily work" of the commanders, were an important instrument of the indoctrination of the soldiers and were produced with the intention of strengthening belief in the National Socialist worldview in their ranks. Most of the points formulated here — buying in Jewish shops, membership in associations, admission of reporters — had de facto already begun to operate in the first two years after Blomberg's appointment as Reichswehr Minister. The first three paragraphs of the brochure were central in content. They concerned, first, the "duties of the German soldier"; second, the relationship between "Wehrmacht and National Socialism"; and third, between "Wehrmacht and Party." The guidelines reflect how far Blomberg's perception of the Wehrmacht had already moved away from a traditional army image, and they show the degree of politicization of the Wehrmacht. Paragraph 1, "Duties of the German Soldier," and Paragraph 2, "Wehrmacht and National Socialism," of the guidelines repeat the unconditional necessity of adapting the National Socialist worldview and conception of the state in the army. The orders of autumn 1935 were the most extensive collection of decrees by the War Minister for the promotion of political indoctrination efforts and for the fundamental definition of the tasks of both "pillars" — army and Party.

The heads of the Reichswehr Ministry drove the course of military policy forward to indirect support of the government in the revolutionizing of the state. Thus already at the end of February 1933, even before the spectacular Reichstag fire, the commanders were informed that the armed power would not take part in the government's struggle against Marxists and Communists, but should nevertheless remain in "benevolent neutrality." In the same sense Blomberg had on 24 February ordered the commander in Military District V, in the event of unrest, not to support the constitutional government in Stuttgart, but the National Socialists. Consistently, after the abolition of the federal structure of the state, he had instructed the commanders of the military districts to "take care for a good, even better cordial relationship with the National Socialist Reich governors appointed in the states."

The leadership of the Reichswehr Ministry consciously accepted that the indirect option for the Hitler movement could go as far as extensive assistance in terrorist measures. Reichenau, acting for Blomberg, gave the commanders in February 1933 the guideline: "Recognition is necessary that we stand in a revolution. What is rotten in the state must fall; that can happen with terror. The Party will proceed ruthlessly against Marxism. Task of the Wehrmacht: rifle at the foot. No support if persecuted persons seek refuge with the troops." With this, the armed forces were instructed to stand with rifle at the foot beside state-sanctioned terror. Some commanders were strongly affected by Reichenau's instruction. They withdrew from the dilemma between inner rejection of the instruction and functional duty of obedience by passing the instruction on only in weakened form.

The indoctrination efforts of the Reichswehr leadership thus contributed decisively to the development

of a military-political constellation through which the inner structure of the Reichswehr and its cohesion were increasingly weakened and perforated.

025

WARS OF SUCCESSION IN THE OFFICER CORPS

Blomberg's appointment as Reichswehr Minister at an age unusually young for this post had been observed with great mistrust by his comrades in the officer corps, and many envied him his brilliant career. Animosities and jealousies had long been anything but rare among the high officers. The "Diadochi struggles" had "inevitably arisen from the hard competition caused by the narrowness of the 100,000-man army." How little homogeneous the officer corps had already been in reality before 1933, and what positional struggles were carried out beneath the surface for different reasons, has already been illuminated: a unified Reichswehr had long since ceased to exist.

Behind his back the War Minister was called "rubber lion" by his comrades, and, after the title of the National Socialist propaganda film *Hitler Youth Quex: A Film on the Sacrificial Spirit of German Youth*, 1933, "Hitler Youth Quex." If one follows the recollection of Wolfgang Gans zu Putlitz, at that time head of the consular department at the German embassy in London, 1934 to 1938, Blomberg was known as a "characterless wet rag."

Whether Blomberg was in fact already before his dismissal in 1938 as unpopular in broad circles of the general officer corps as the majority of statements and recollections by German generals after 1938, or after 1945, suggest, must nevertheless be very much doubted. There was unquestionably a collective aversion to the War Minister, which however rather fermented beneath the surface and first became channeled in the course of the Blomberg-Fritsch crisis. Blomberg had shown himself an anti-traditionalist, a Reinhardt pupil, and an opponent of the "Schleicher clique," and was regarded by some as a strange "sectarian." During the interrogations in Nuremberg, General Field Marshal Rundstedt summarized the opinion allegedly prevailing in the general officer corps about Blomberg at that time as follows: "Blomberg was always somewhat alien to us; he floated in other regions. He was somewhat (...) theosophical and so forth; actually no one could really stand him."

Rundstedt, who as the senior in service was in any case probably not well disposed toward Blomberg, who had been preferred over him, was right on one point: Blomberg was an unusual figure in the circle of the general officer corps. To the more or less uneducated officers, an intellectual comrade who spoke several languages, was above-average in literary and scholarly education, and attended operas and concerts appeared suspect — Rundstedt's "and so forth." Added to this was Blomberg's soft manner, his calm, friendly composure, and the eternally polite smile on his face, which made it difficult to look behind his façade. Many did not take him entirely seriously, since in many things he decisively contradicted their collective understanding of military authority. The accusation of having been "somewhat theosophical" weighed especially heavily and was indeed not entirely unfounded, as Blomberg's engagement in the School of Wisdom and in the circle around Wolfgang Muff in the 1920s proves. In fact, his reception of Steiner was a very unusual inclination for a general of Wilhelmine stamp, since officers were supposed to be either strictly Protestant or Catholic.

Blomberg, who sought to change the image of the Wehrmacht in Hitler's sense in order to preserve its power, and who in doing so aimed at a symbolic and ideological penetration and appropriation of traditions, had above all to meet with rejection on the part of the older officers in the army, the

traditionalists and Schlieffen pupils. The “and so forth” which Rundstedt does not spell out in his collective judgment on Blomberg referred to the topoi resulting from this: he wanted to enforce the new radically, showed bourgeois attitudes and a lack of estate-consciousness, was a technocrat, seemed unmilitary, and could not take traditions seriously. Precisely this willingness to break with traditions was a quality that many younger subordinates of Blomberg greatly valued. During a voyage to the Nordic countries in the circle of his collaborators, the War Minister in October 1936 introduced for the first time the Sie decree; through it the Frederician form of address to a superior in the third person, as it had previously been customary in the Wehrmacht, disappeared. The Sie decree was judged very critically by the traditionalists within the general officer corps, since it was perceived as extremely “unmilitary.” Despite his peculiarities of character, therefore, Blomberg as a superior was judged rather positively, which was due both to his abilities and to the fact that he left his collaborators relatively much scope, as was shown by the example of Reichenau and confirmed by Keitel.

Foreign observers very much noticed the aversion prevailing in the general officer corps toward the Defense Minister. According to Basil Liddell Hart’s assessment, this “hostile feeling” of many generals toward Blomberg was intensified by the “contempt for the Bohemian corporal.” Many generals had indeed been prepared to welcome Hitler’s rise to power, since they could instrumentalize it for “their own rearmament plans,” but, according to the British military theorist’s assessment, “the thought seemed ridiculous to them that one should trust a former corporal’s judgment in military questions. All the more quickly did they criticize every preference that he showed in military promotions.”

Joachim von Stülpnagel reports that Blomberg “soon already had no personalities in his official surroundings, except his subordinates, with whom he could speak completely openly.” This isolation into which Blomberg fell in the circle of the officer corps led him, on the one hand, ever closer to Hitler and, on the other hand, further weakened the cohesion of the officer corps — a vicious circle with fatal consequences. In the memory of the later, 1938, deputy to Alfred Jodl in the High Command of the Wehrmacht, OKW, General Walter Warlimont, it was, still more than Blomberg’s dependence on Hitler and “sophistication,” military-political — and thus tangible — reasons that contributed to his rejection in certain parts of the general officer corps: “It was the High Command of the Army with its General Staff from which the sharpest and most lasting resistance to Blomberg and the ‘Wehrmacht command staff’ proceeded. The official tensions that grew out of these oppositions even entered into personal relations. Thereby a split previously unknown among the leading generals who had emerged from the army was initiated, amounting to not much less than a political division of the high officer corps: here National Socialist-revolutionary innovators, there the conservative army.”

The polarizing formula “here National Socialist-revolutionary innovators, there the conservative army” unquestionably falls short. Far more decisive was that with Blomberg’s assumption of office a general of the army had become Reichswehr Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. The self-sufficiency of the chiefs of the Army Command and Naval Command therefore necessarily had to come to an end; their offices threatened to be mediatized. This brought a personal element into the problem, especially since Blomberg, during the one year, 1933, of cooperation with Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord, who had shown himself demonstratively listless and tired of office in view of the advancing politicization of the army, had “to an ever greater degree accustomed himself to intervening in the powers of the Army Command, or directly appropriating rights from its sphere.” To replace this Chief of Army Command and draw his powers to himself was Reichenau’s ambitiously pursued goal since his appointment as chief of the Wehrmachtamt. Reichenau’s takeover of this office would have meant the disempowerment of the old Army Command. Although Blomberg and Hitler showed themselves open to appointing Reichenau as successor to Hammerstein, who on 27 December 1933 had declared his resignation effective 31 January 1934, his ambitions failed on the veto of the

Reich President, who objected above all to Reichenau's lack of experience as regimental commander. That Blomberg attached so much importance to Reichenau's appointment as Chief of Army Command that he threatened Hindenburg with his resignation if Reichenau did not become Chief of Army Command is very unlikely. Waldemar Erfurth does not document this assertion he made either, which he attributes to Blomberg's alleged subservience toward Hitler and to his political stupidity.

When Colonel General Werner von Fritsch was appointed Hammerstein's successor on 4 January 1934, contemporaries at home and abroad placed their hopes on the new Chief of Army Command as the coming strong man in the Reichswehr Ministry. Fritsch was celebrated as a conservatively minded, conscientious military specialist and "soldier of great abilities," who on the one hand stood positively toward the National Socialist system, while on the other hand, unlike Reichenau and Blomberg, he sought uncompromisingly to push back any Party influence on the affairs of the army. People hoped that this man, dubbed by Waldemar Erfurth a "knight without fear and reproach," could or would steer the military-political course of the German army in another direction. From the British perspective, in 1934, "the man who counts [is] not von Blomberg, who is amiable and weak, but von Fritsch and the immediate future rests in his hands."

The fact that Reichenau continued to strive for the powerful position of Chief of Army Command is probably the actual cause of his discrepancies with Fritsch, which placed an extreme burden on cooperation between the Army Command and the Reichswehr Ministry in the years from 1934 to 1938 and also impaired the personal relationship between Blomberg and Fritsch.

When Reichenau in October 1935 was replaced as chief of the Wehrmachtamt by the equally ambitious and power-hungry Wilhelm Keitel, this made headlines in the foreign press. There, people suspected in Reichenau's transfer "to one of the many infantry divisions" in the Reich a "sidelining," and in this a symbol of the victory of the Army Command over the ministerial summit in the Reichswehr Ministry. The *Pariser Tageblatt* triumphed: "Fritsch has been stronger than he [Reichenau] and has understood how to push the troublesome opponent off into the provinces." In the same article there is found the hopeful supposition that the change in this central key position in the Reichswehr Ministry revealed "the pushing back of that wing of the Reichswehr which has entered into and identified itself all too much and all too intimately with the NS Party." Although behind Reichenau's transfer there may also have stood the aim of Blomberg and Hitler to accommodate Fritsch in his demands for more influence and remove his sharpest competitor from the corridors of power, it was an illusory hope that the Army Command could have wished or been able to dam up the influences of National Socialism within the officer corps.

Fritsch himself spoke vehemently against the expectations connected with his position and person at home and abroad in a letter to the commanding generals in August 1935: "Furthermore I repeatedly hear: our hope is the Commander-in-Chief of the Army; he will put things in order. In what way people imagine this will happen will differ greatly according to the personal view of individuals. Undoubtedly, however, one or another is thinking also of violent measures. I can say only the following on this: according to my firm conviction, Germany's future is bound for better or worse to National Socialism. Whoever acts harmfully against the National Socialist state is a criminal. If such an act were to proceed from me, it would moreover be an act of base disloyalty against the person of the Führer."

Fritsch may indeed have complained that it was not always easy to have the painfully precise Blomberg as immediate superior — an experience he had already had to undergo in 1928 as department chief of T1 under Blomberg as Chief of the Truppenamt — but one must not interpret either such remarks or the differences between Army Command and political Reichswehr leadership, arising primarily from

departmental egoism, as a fundamental antagonism between Blomberg and Fritsch. There had at no time been a veritable “struggle.” Fritsch himself did not see it otherwise. In 1935, before the commanding generals, he addressed the rumors circulating about his poor relationship with Blomberg: “From reports repeatedly reaching me, I must conclude that in the officer corps here and there there is talk of an alleged opposition between the Herr Reich War Minister and me. No such opposition exists. Rather, in all fundamental questions there exists between the Reich War Minister and me complete agreement of views.”

The main point of dispute between Reichswehr leadership, Blomberg/Reichenau–Keitel, and Army Command, Fritsch/Beck, was a different conception of the structure of the supreme military command organization. This was a political issue of first rank, and Klaus-Jürgen Müller has pointed in detail to the close interlocking between the supreme military structure and foreign-policy planning. Thus one understands why the dispute over the top-level structure of the Wehrmacht overshadowed the years from 1934 to 1937 and at times took on such violent forms. The substantive problem had emerged since the First World War. It consisted in the necessity of finding a command structure for the entire armed forces appropriate to the comprehensive organization of the fighting nation in war, that is, to coordinate the operations of army and navy in planning and execution, to shape them uniformly, and to work them into an overall strategic concept. The Army Command, which precisely in the Seeckt era had possessed immense fullness of power and dominated the civilian Defense Minister in his powers, proceeded — carrying on Schlieffen — from a future land war and from the resulting supremacy of the Army Command. Consequently, people considered transferring supreme command over the entire Wehrmacht, including the navy and possible future air forces, to the Chief of Army Command in the event of war. This policy amounted to conserving and expanding the position and power that Seeckt had held as Chief of Army Command and preserving the preponderance of the army.

These were ideas that in no way corresponded to Blomberg’s military thinking and that, as shown, he had already sharply criticized during the Weimar years. For Blomberg, who as former Chief of the Truppenamt was familiar with the substantive circumstances and necessities of a structure of supreme military command organization, it was certain that in an emergency there could be only one common command for all three parts of the Wehrmacht — army, navy, and air force — and thus that the age of one-sided land warfare was over. Blomberg summarized these fundamental views in a speech that he gave on 15 October 1935 on the occasion of the ceremonial reopening of the War Academy, which had been forbidden by the Versailles Treaty: “One may (...) not consider the individual subject of the army without the whole of the Wehrmacht. All parts of the Wehrmacht must be coordinated with one another in order to produce a harmonious overall solution. From the triad of army, navy, and air force the trinity of the new Wehrmacht has been created.”

If, to Blomberg’s taste, even Fritsch had not opened himself sufficiently to the possibilities of the tank and the air force — since he regarded the new weapons as “upstarts” and wanted strictly to subordinate them to the interests of the army — he criticized still more the Chief of the Army General Staff, Ludwig Beck, because of his traditionalism and his lack of willingness to open himself to armored technology and other military innovations. Blomberg’s attitude toward Beck, who in the Second World War was to belong to the leading heads of the liberal-conservative resistance movement, had to arise already from Beck’s pronounced “closeness to Schlieffen,” and Blomberg expressed himself with displeasure over his “Schlieffenism,” which “no longer agreed at all with the reality of our days.” Such emotionally colored statements may be understandable as an expression of personal aversion or departmental egoism. Since the economic resources of the Reich were limited, defense-economic and armament policy aimed at providing the scarce economic foundations for a “broad armament,” with which the conduct of lightning wars was possible, and corresponded less to a comprehensive “deep

armament” that would have prepared the economic system, as well as the armament, munitions supply, and equipment of the Wehrmacht, for a longer war. The three parts of the Wehrmacht, however, each sought to use the limited economic sources and capacities for their own purposes, so that overall no uniform and planned armament came into being.

Blomberg’s search for solutions for a reorganization of the top wartime command structure was guided by his conception of the modern future war, which he apparently interpreted dialectically, since he understood it as a “possible defensive case” and at the same time as total “people’s war.” One of the decisive lessons he had drawn from the First World War and from his reception of Muff’s military-philosophical writings and those of the “Young Generation” was that “total,” highly technological war required not only the coordinated employment of combat formations, but also the unified direction of economic and armaments programs. Reinhardt, later Groener and Schleicher too, had already seen this in this way and had worked out proposals pointing in this direction. Beck was in no way in agreement that Blomberg radicalized this line of Weimar military policy during his term of office at the cost of the primacy of the army, and in doing so led the Clausewitzian primacy of politics ad absurdum in favor of an irrational rearmament endangering German foreign policy. Beck found himself in constant exchange of ideas with State Secretary Bernhard von Bülow, who gave the Chief of the Truppenamt a very precise picture of reactions abroad to German military policy. The fact that Blomberg forbade him contact with Bülow makes the tensions between Army and Reichswehr leadership more than clear.

The vision of a unified High Command of the Wehrmacht was not consistently realized for several reasons. On the one hand, Blomberg’s staff, the Wehrmachtamt, was too small and too inexperienced for the requirements of comprehensive military planning, which was expressed in the fact that the Army General Staff had to plan the joint maneuvers of the three Wehrmacht parts in 1937. On the other hand, Blomberg’s possibilities of controlling the rapidly expanding Luftwaffe were strongly restricted by Göring’s special position in the spirit of the “Führer principle” practiced by Hitler.

The conflict between Army Command and Blomberg/Reichenau — and this must be emphasized — who had passed through the same school of the General Staff, was to ignite most sharply over the question of war planning, as would be shown most drastically in 1937 by Beck’s refusal to examine the military planning concerning Czechoslovakia, worked out by the ministry, for its degree of usefulness. After the Sudeten crisis in August 1938, Beck, by then colonel general, would draw the consequences from his military-political thinking and resign from his office.

Because the construction of an efficient air force was essential for Blomberg, he helped it attain its outstanding position within the structure of the three Wehrmacht parts, thereby at the same time cutting back his own power. The general was certainly no genuine air-force theorist; yet his views of the role of the air force within the Wehrmacht coincided with the most important theses of the late 1920s and the 1930s. His study of the American and Soviet air forces during the Weimar period played a decisive role here. Blomberg rejected the idea of a “lightning war from the air”; he was not of the opinion that the air force should adopt the teachings of the Italian general and war theorist Giulio Douhet and concentrate primarily on strategic bombing. Instead he thought the Luftwaffe had to be conceived and equipped so that in the context of a future European war it could conduct an “operational air war” either independently or in cooperation with the army and the Kriegsmarine. The appointment at the end of January 1933, as one of the Reichswehr Minister’s first measures, of Hermann Göring as Reich Commissar for Aviation corresponded to this conception of the Defense Minister of a dominant air force, as he had seen it during his journey to the USA in 1931. It agreed with the conception defined by Hitler of making the air force the most important weapon of the future. Blomberg not only created, with the Reich Air Ministry, the institutional foundations for the development of the Luftwaffe as an

independent branch of the armed forces, but also ensured its preferential treatment in the allocation of raw materials and personnel. Therefore he also had some of the most promising army officers, among them Hans Jeschonnek, Albert Kesselring, and Walter Wever, transferred to the emerging Luftwaffe. In the coming years they then also took important roles in the construction and leadership of the Luftwaffe.

Despite this preferential treatment of the Luftwaffe by the Reichswehr Minister, there were also struggles with the power-hungry Göring over the distribution of raw materials and the development of the Luftwaffe. The later Reich Marshal and, from 1935, Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe, prepared the construction of the Luftwaffe, under the premises transformed in his sense, from 1933 onward first as Reich Commissar for Air Traffic and then as Reich Minister of Aviation, as a kind of “National Socialist house power.” The imposing Aviation Ministry in Berlin’s Leipziger Straße, erected especially for his office by the architect Ernst Sagebiel, was under these auspices more than a parade example of National Socialist administrative buildings. In its monumentality the building seemed to manifest Göring’s aim of developing the Luftwaffe into a superior part of the Wehrmacht and subordinating the other parts to it. For Göring it was certain that he would never subordinate himself to Blomberg’s leadership, especially since “his” Luftwaffe was also his instrument of power in inner-Party rivalries. Göring was indeed subordinate to Blomberg in the military hierarchy, but at the same time, like him, a cabinet minister. Göring’s hunger for office and the specific composition of the new part of the Wehrmacht contributed to further weakening the homogeneity of the already rotten Wehrmacht leadership.

It becomes clear that overlaps of powers and competition, as were typical for the officially tightly structured Führer state, became more and more reality in the Wehrmacht too.

The Diadochi struggles accompanied the military-political development of the years down to Blomberg’s dismissal in decisive fashion and stood in interdependence with other problems of Wehrmacht leadership, such as the smoldering conflict with the SA. In spring 1938, in the course of the Blomberg crisis, Hitler would seemingly bring the Diadochi struggles within the Wehrmacht — which, besides the organizational sphere, also extended to the refilling of the high posts of the army — finally to a close. Until then he had scarcely concerned himself with such problems, just as little as with details in armament questions, not least because, as Blomberg thought, he believed that under him “everything was in the best order.”

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THE DISEMPOWERMENT OF THE SA, 1934

At the end of 1933 Hitler had not yet attained total dictatorial power. Despite the astonishingly rapid transformation of the political scene, on his path toward unrestricted power in the state there lay two considerable and closely interwoven obstacles: the Reichswehr under Blomberg and the SA, which within only five weeks in summer 1934 he consistently eliminated through the murder of the SA leadership in the “Night of the Long Knives,” thereby reaching a further decisive stage in the process of securing total power.

Alongside the swastika flags, it was above all the brown uniforms of the SA that shaped the public street image after the takeover of power. Hitler’s paramilitary private army, originally founded as a

hall-protection force, had numbered about 40,000 men in January 1933; by spring 1934 it had swollen to about four million members.

In analyzing Blomberg's attitude toward the SA, one must a priori bear in mind a glaring difference between the military-political self-understanding of members of the SA and of the Reichswehr. The soldierly self-understanding of both groups resulted from completely contrary social and war experiences: while the thinking of most officers of the Reichswehr was ruled by an elitist Prussian consciousness of state and by traditional categories such as discipline, obedience, and duty, Röhm set against this a military-political thinking resulting from experiences as a front soldier. Almost all differences between Reichswehr and SA can be interpreted from this contrast of experiences and memories.

Blomberg's attitude toward the SA passed through three phases. Even though his image of SA men was clouded by impressions he had gathered of them in Königsberg, where he had found them "little heroic," plebeian, and brutal — qualities he found extremely unsympathetic — initially what predominated was still his openness toward the front-fighter and Freikorps mentality prevailing in the ranks of the Brownshirts. Thus before and during the seizure of power he had a moderate, rather ambivalent attitude toward the SA, which can be seen in continuity with Stülpnagel's 1924 memorandum *Thoughts on the War of the Future* and the military-reform idea inherent in it of integrating all elements willing to bear arms into soldierly training.

Regardless of the fact that the SA represented a competitor for the Reichswehr, it appeared attractive to him as a potential reservoir for creating a mass base. By bringing the huge SA potential close to the Reichswehr, he wanted to guarantee national defense, the "Wehrhaftmachung," which he had postulated as the highest maxim of his military policy as Reichswehr Minister in the commanders' conference of 3 February 1933. In October 1933 he issued the instruction to intensify cooperation with the SA at the local level. Nevertheless the minister remained cautious and repeatedly emphasized the army's monopoly of arms in conferences and decrees.

The expectations that SA members had connected with Hitler's assumption of power had by no means been fulfilled by political events so far. The great transformation of conditions hoped for by the SA leaders had failed to appear, and the confused talk of a second "revolution" began. Above all the Chief of Staff of the SA, the former Bavarian captain Ernst Julius Röhm, 1887–1934, one of Hitler's few friends on familiar terms, demanded a "second revolution" with a radical social transformation. In an article by the Supreme SA Leader, which appeared in the *National Socialist Monthly* in June 1933, he expressed his demand loudly: "Whoever now wanted to be our companion on the path in flaming torchlight processions and imposing marches, amid rattling drums and booming kettledrums, amid blaring fanfares and beneath waving flags and standards, and now believes he has 'taken part' in the German revolution — let him go home. He has confused the 'national uprising' with the German revolution! This goal is far from having been reached!"

Röhm, who had personally managed the affairs of the SA since 1931, had gone to Bolivia after the failed Hitler putsch of 1923. There he had worked as a military adviser and had risen to lieutenant colonel in the General Staff. In December 1933 he had been appointed by Hitler Reich Minister without portfolio and began in this function to direct the terrorist measures of the SA. He had hoped that after the seizure of power the SA would, through fusion with the numerically small Reichswehr and the "elimination" of the reactionary generals, become the core of a new National Socialist people's army.

Röhm had dressed the demand for incorporation of the Reichswehr by the SA in the much-cited metaphor of the “gray rock [the Reichswehr] that must go under in the brown flood [of the SA].” While Blomberg’s military concept turned this demand on its head and virtually envisaged the breaking of the brown flood-waves against the gray rock of the Reichswehr, a number of former front officers and SA members already felt themselves to be future generals.

Röhm’s ambitions for an organizational independence of his force as a future people’s militia with the state monopoly of arms represented, for the Reichswehr, a growing destabilizing factor, and Röhm’s transformational ideas were decisively rejected. When around the turn of the year 1933–34 the tensions between SA and Reichswehr had increased so drastically that it became apparent that all attempts at cooperation were condemned to fail, Blomberg developed into an opponent of the SA, though he still allowed Reichenau, who was much readier for concessions in SA questions than his superior, to continue negotiating with Röhm.

For Blomberg and Reichenau there arose the delicate problem that on the one hand tensions between SA and Reichswehr were increasing, with unpleasant incidents and physical attacks by SA men on officers, while on the other hand they absolutely wanted to avoid deployment of the Reichswehr against the SA. After all, here was a reservoir of four million men fit for military service, which would play a decisive role in the reintroduction of universal military service expected from Hitler.

It is disputed in research whether Blomberg possessed an SA concept of his own — no written concept has survived — and sought to impose it through his chief of the Ministeramt, or whether the search for a principled cooperation with Röhm’s people came about solely through Reichenau’s initiative, as has been repeatedly asserted. Here again it must be said that Reichenau acted actively, but always as Blomberg’s cardinal in politics and ultimately according to his orders.

In Ernst Röhm, Blomberg saw a self-appointed “Bonaparte of the Third Reich” and a rival. Looking back, he calls him an “unsympathetic anarchist who wanted to come to power with his criminal clique.” “He defended neither a definite ideal nor possessed any clear plans for a German government. His chief goal consisted in gaining control over the army.” Blomberg also believed that Röhm wanted to remove him, and then “not stop even before Hitler.”

The threat posed by the SA to the Reichswehr’s monopoly of arms led for the first time to tensions between Blomberg and Hitler. Blomberg describes his own behavior during this period as follows: “I warned the Führer that we German soldiers would defend our position with our lives and that he would soon have to reckon with a civil war. At first he tried his usual game of balancing the contending forces.” Blomberg and Reichenau did not know for a long time how Hitler would decide in this conflict.

The aims of Hitler and of the recalcitrant Röhm, to whom Hitler after all owed a good part of his success, had for some time been diverging more and more; nevertheless it was not unproblematic for the dictator to disempower or eliminate the SA. It was an enormous organization, far larger than the NSDAP itself. Thus Hitler did nothing for a long time, kept Röhm on a long leash, and put off Blomberg and other generals until the day of “reckoning.” He never expressly rejected the SA’s claim to co-determination in military questions, however often he calmed Blomberg and the rest of the Reichswehr leadership and put them off until the day of “reckoning.” In his speech on the first anniversary of the “seizure of power” on 30 January 1934, Hitler described the NSDAP and the Reichswehr as the two supports of the state; in the SA he still saw the “unshakable guard of the National Socialist revolution.” Shortly afterward he seems to have recognized that he was moving in a

dangerous fluid of power loss, and that he had no choice but to curb Röhm's world-political ambitions.

On 1 February Röhm had sent Blomberg a memorandum on the relationship between Reichswehr and SA. In it he demanded — as far as is known, the memorandum itself has not survived — that the field of responsibility for national defense be transferred to the SA, and the function of the Reichswehr be reduced to the training of men for the SA. From Blomberg's viewpoint these demands were illusory and presumptuous. "It was clear," according to Maximilian von Weichs, who was in the Reichswehr Ministry when Röhm's memorandum arrived, "that an embittered struggle between Blomberg and Röhm would now begin." Blomberg may have been so outraged by Röhm's memorandum that he deliberately interpreted it incorrectly and reproduced it just as incorrectly when he spoke about it the next day before the military district commanders. The commanders reacted, as expected, with horror and indignation. Hitler must now decide, Blomberg declared. He had understood that it was necessary to act in order to show Hitler his loyalty and prevent him from deciding in favor of Röhm, who was likewise courting Hitler's favor.

The decree of the Reichswehr Minister of 19 February 1934 on the National Socialist sovereign insignia is also to be interpreted in this connection. Blomberg had had Principles for Cooperation with the SA worked out, which "in veiled form, but unambiguously in substance," laid down the primacy of the Reichswehr and the subordination of the SA. This found expression in the Guidelines on Cooperation with the SA, of which the Chief of Army Command informed the commanders on 27 February as a "proposal for cooperation with the SA" — designated as a "proposal" for reasons of camouflage.

On the following day Hitler proved that he had made the decision for which Blomberg had long been waiting: the leadership of SA, SS, and Reichswehr had assembled in the Bendlerstraße. There, in a military-political policy speech, Hitler for the first time expressly spoke against Röhm's plans for an SA militia and declared that the SA should restrict its activity to politics and should not become militarily active. He demanded that the SA submit to his instructions, and approved Blomberg's plan to use the SA, until the construction of the Wehrmacht, for tasks in the field of border protection and pre-military training. "The Wehrmacht," the Reich Chancellor said, must "be and remain the sole bearer of arms of the nation."

For Röhm, Hitler's words were the pure poison of defeat, while in the ears of the Reichswehr leadership they must have sounded like music. To be sure, both Röhm and Blomberg signed on that 28 February the Guidelines for Cooperation between SA and Reichswehr, but the atmosphere of tension, mistrust, and aggression intensified on both sides in the following months after this meeting.

Röhm's reaction to Hitler's military-political policy decision was ambivalent. On the one hand he passed the Guidelines on to the SA inspectorates; on the other hand, in the following weeks, he defiantly demonstrated his demands, railed against Hitler, armed the SA with heavy infantry weapons, organized large SA marches, and made contact with Schleicher and circles of foreign diplomats. Röhm's conduct caused the War Minister to order systematic observation of the SA by the Reichswehr, during which materials on violations by SA members of the agreement of 28 February were collected and forwarded to Hitler.

At the same time the War Minister ordered an intensification of political instruction in the Wehrmacht in April 1934; he also had a veritable "defense propaganda action" set in motion. The intention of these measures was "to make the Wehrmacht appear in public life more than before as the sole bearer of arms of the nation." A comparison of Blomberg's instruction of April 1934 with an earlier one, of 21

November 1933, on national-political instruction clearly shows the acute power-political component of his indoctrination policy within the power conflict with the SA.

Possibly the fear of a putsch by the SA in circles of the general officer corps really existed; possibly it was merely invoked by Blomberg and others. The pressure of the Reichswehr in the matter of the SA drove Hitler to a final decision on the question of the arms monopoly when the situation in summer 1934, also because of the question of Hindenburg's succession, dramatically came to a head. It appears as if until the end he had wavered between a decision in favor of Röhm and the SA or in favor of the Reichswehr under Blomberg. Finally the power-political circumstances, as well as Blomberg's declarations of loyalty and Reichenau's tireless lobbying, forced him into a pact with the Reichswehr leadership.

Wheeler-Bennett reports such a "pact" between Blomberg and Hitler, which both allegedly concluded on board the armored ship *Deutschland* on 11 April 1934 during a voyage on the North Sea. Blomberg allegedly promised Hitler his support in view of Hindenburg's expected death, while Hitler supposedly assured him that he would put an end to the claims of Röhm and the SA once and for all. For this pact on the *Deutschland*, however, there is no evidence.

Michael Stürmer thinks Blomberg pressed Hitler in summer 1934 almost directly toward a decision in favor of the Reichswehr, and in some presentations one finds the thesis that Blomberg, with his will to curtail Röhm's claim to power, virtually threatened Hitler. This "threatening" of Hitler by Blomberg is said to have taken place during Hitler's visit to Reich President von Hindenburg at his Neudeck estate shortly before the Röhm crisis, on 21 June 1934.

The British historian Wheeler-Bennett supplies the following version of the events at Neudeck: "Hitler found that Blomberg had traveled to Neudeck. Vice Chancellor von Papen, Neurath and Schwerin von Krosigk [visited] Hitler on 20 June 1934 and offered their resignations. The 'Führer' was clear that the Right would not let itself be intimidated. He did indeed reject the offers of resignation, but was in considerable concern and unrest when he flew to Neudeck the next morning (...). The Chancellor was received on the outside steps of the palace by General von Blomberg in full uniform, a Blomberg who no longer had anything about him of the amiable 'rubber lion' or the enthusiastic 'Hitler Youth Quex,' but embodied the strict inexorability of the Prussian military caste. He had the mission, said the general, in the name of the President, to discuss the measures that were necessary in order to secure internal peace in Germany. Otherwise the Reich President would impose the state of siege and transfer control of state affairs to the army" — that is, order Hitler's disempowerment. "In the course of a five-minute audience, Hindenburg repeated in Blomberg's presence what the latter had already opened to the Chancellor." "This time Blomberg was not the amiable courtier," according to the British journalist Sefton Delmer, "with whom it was so easy to deal that Hitler had baptized him the 'rubber lion.' This time Blomberg appeared closed and hostile." It may only be noted in passing that it was not Hitler who had called Blomberg a "rubber lion." The general owed this unfriendly title to his comrades in the general officer corps.

The absurd idea of Hitler being threatened by Blomberg on the eve of the Röhm crisis developed into a kind of historical joke when, in a *Spiegel* article published in 1983, with a highly symbolic reference to the key role of the Reichswehr, it was reported: "The Chancellor climbed the outside steps of Schloss Neudeck on 21 June; Reichswehr Minister von Blomberg stepped toward him and explained to Hitler that it was urgently necessary to restore the internal peace of the Reich, that there was no place for radical troublemakers in the new Germany."

Significant is Benoist-Méchin's supposition that at Neudeck Hitler received not only "a sharp rebuff," but "by chance an especially valuable piece of information": "He heard of rumors that General von Schleicher was spinning new intrigues and had entered into secret negotiations with Gregor Strasser." Unfortunately the author does not reveal whether Hindenburg or Blomberg conveyed to Hitler this "valuable information," which may have contributed its part to the murder of Schleicher that took place shortly thereafter.

One origin of the rumors about Hitler's "threatening" by Blomberg on the eve of the Röhm murders — for which not a single piece of evidence exists in Blomberg's own notes — is found in the White Book on the Shootings of 30 June 1934, published in Paris in 1935 by emigrated Communist functionaries. Papen, "in the role of the attacker," supposedly threatened Hitler with his own resignation and "the resignation of the other conservative ministers" and "declared that he intended to report to Hindenburg on 23 June. In order to forestall him, Hitler flies to Neudeck on 21 June. The reception is cold. The sick President has only little time for his Reich Chancellor. Hitler is quickly dismissed again. He realizes there is no turning back, no maneuvering any longer; the bill must now be paid."

Otto Strasser reports that at Neudeck Hitler "saw himself facing two gentlemen in Reichswehr generals' uniforms on the threshold of the palace: Blomberg and Göring. From above, Reichswehr Minister Blomberg declared to the completely dumbfounded Reich Chancellor that, on the report of the Vice Chancellor, the Herr Reich President had ordered him and General Göring, as commander of the police, to Neudeck in order to discuss with them all measures for the protection of internal peace (...). In Blomberg's presence the Reich President briefly confirms the communications of the Reichswehr Minister. Cool farewell from Generals Blomberg and Göring." "(...) When Hitler left Neudeck, he knew that the Reich President would never sanction the second revolution. On the contrary. The President had threateningly informed him in the presence of Reichswehr Minister Blomberg that he — supported by the Reichswehr — would proclaim the state of emergency (...)."

The American journalist William Shirer took this impressive scene into a book account, though he dropped Göring's role, which evidently seemed too daring even to him. A GDR author explained the events dialectically, invoking the Paris White Book of 1934: "In the most extreme case the Reichswehr leadership was determined, after imposition of the state of siege, to exercise control of state affairs itself, as Blomberg and Hindenburg threatened Hitler on 21 June in the event that he should continue to remain inactive against the SA. Hitler was thereby caused to participate personally in the final preparations for the bloodbath that took place a week later."

How the encounter of the Reich President with his Reich Chancellor Hitler supposedly really took place is something Hitler told his loyal paladin Alfred Rosenberg, who recorded the perspective of his "Führer" in his diary on 28 June 1934 as follows: "The Führer does not yet want to undertake anything against the whole reaction. His consideration for Hindenburg is positively touching. He tells that the old gentleman had never been so friendly as at the last visit (...). He supported himself only on his arm and said: 'Now support me in this way too, my Chancellor.' Hitler wants to spare him all grief, since he believes that it cannot be long now with Hindenburg." Judging by Rosenberg's description, it was as Hans Rudolf Berndorff thinks: "All depictions of the eternal hostilities between Hindenburg and Hitler belong in the realm of fable. Hitler had actually become the man of Hindenburg's confidence."

Hitler had thus only after long hesitation and equally long persuasion by Röhm's enemies among his closest collaborators prepared himself to send his old friend on familiar terms to death. On the night of 30 June 1934, he boarded an airplane from Bonn to Munich. What now followed was a planned murder action with the aim of smashing the SA as a competing power factor. The action began when Hitler

landed at dawn on the Oberwiesenfeld. “Throughout the whole night, inhaling the idea of the ‘traitor Röhm’ like a drug, he had whipped himself up.” At this point he knew that he had to separate himself from his once loyally devoted comrade-in-struggle Röhm in order not to endanger further his relationship to Blomberg and the Reichswehr.

Accompanied by Goebbels and several SS men, he had himself driven to Bad Wiessee on the Tegernsee. The lake was called “Lago di Bonzi,” because many National Socialist greats, as Blomberg too would do, had bought villas on its shores. Hitler’s goal was the spa hotel Pension Hanselbauer, where SA chief Röhm and his closest confidants had assembled in order to prepare for a conference Hitler had called. When Hitler’s motorcade pulled up, Röhm and his men were still asleep. The scene that is said to have taken place in Röhm’s room has been vividly presented by the historian David Clay Large as follows: “With whip in hand Hitler entered Röhm’s bedroom and ordered him to get dressed: ‘Röhm, you are under arrest!’ he barked at the sleepy captain. Röhm could just stammer ‘Heil, mein Führer’ before Hitler stamped out of the room. Some of the Brownshirts whom Hitler tore from their drunken slumber were lying in bed with underage boys.” The homosexual “Sodom” that was allegedly found in the Pension Hanselbauer was later exploited by Goebbels with relish in the National Socialist propaganda newspaper *Der Angriff* and in radio speeches, and he spread the rumor that Röhm too had been surprised that night with a boy.

Simultaneously with Röhm’s murder on the night of 30 June, Hitler had the entire SA leadership liquidated by SS units and afterward officially proclaimed the end of the “cleansing action.” At the same time he settled “old scores,” whose victims included “old fighters” of the NSDAP as well as opponents of National Socialism. General Schleicher and his wife were brutally shot down in their Berlin apartment, and Reichenau’s predecessor as chief of the Ministeramt, Major General Ferdinand von Bredow, was also murdered. The murder action, disguised by the National Socialists as reaction to a “Röhm putsch,” in which the number of those killed came to a total of 150 to 200 persons, was justified retroactively by law by the Reich government on 2 July 1934 as a “state emergency.”

What remained was an SA that represented scarcely more than a military-sports association. Its task was from then on restricted to “defense education.” In the field of pre- and post-military training it was switched off, and it was no longer permitted to set up military formations. Blomberg forbade the Reichswehr to continue any cooperation with the SA, whose disarming, ordered by Hitler, he had precisely monitored.

Hitler himself refused to assume responsibility for the massacre by claiming that it had occurred against his will. At the same time, in large-scale speeches, he represented Röhm’s elimination as an act of great benefit for the German people and proclaimed that all measures connected with it were thereby justified. In Germany there was celebration. Already on 1 July, in a decree to the Wehrmacht, Blomberg praised the “soldierly decisiveness” and the “exemplary courage” with which the Reich Chancellor had “himself attacked and struck down the traitors and mutineers.” The Wehrmacht, according to Blomberg, thanked him through its “devotion and loyalty.” This corresponded to the public opinion of many who, unlike Blomberg, had less knowledge of the power struggles that had taken place behind the scenes of the “Röhm putsch.” Hitler’s reputation, according to Ian Kershaw, had risen after Röhm’s murder even among those who had previously stood opposed to National Socialism. “One does not merely admire the Führer; he is worshiped,” it was reported from a small town in northeastern Bavaria.

With the Röhm affair, as also with the murder of Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss on 25 July 1934 — Hitler and Blomberg were attending the Bayreuth Festival on that day — by Austrian SS men, the cruel and brutal vein of the Hitler regime became unmistakable abroad. Toward foreign observers

Blomberg justified the action of the Wehrmacht on 30 June as the prevention of a civil war. In a conversation with the British ambassador in Berlin, Sir Eric Phipps, he said Röhm had set a conspiracy in motion that had made it absolutely necessary to take severe measures of suppression in order to prevent such a civil war.

Blomberg's role as Hitler's accomplice in the Röhm murder case is unquestionably dubious, but unfortunately cannot be reconstructed precisely. He moved in a gray zone of involvement. In his notes he is silent about this chapter of his biography, and the statements during the interrogations in Nuremberg are not illuminating. At least he notes with satisfaction in his notes that "Röhm and his people were dealt with." Otherwise, from the retrospective perspective, he sees his own role as very passive and Hitler and the SS as the active actors. This corresponded in a certain sense to reality, since the actual "cleansing action" was carried out by SS formations.

The topos often found in the memoirs of officers involved in the elimination of the SA, that the dualism between Reichswehr and SA had been removed in 1934 "without the army's doing," has however long since been refuted. In fact Blomberg had made sure that during the cleansing action the Reichswehr stood "rifle at the foot," and had ordered smooth cooperation between SS and local command offices of the Reichswehr, especially in the Bavarian area and in Berlin, as well as technical support, accommodation, and provisioning of the SS units. The Reichswehr provided the weapons, materials, and vehicles used on 30 June 1934.

The surviving sources show the considerable extent of Reichswehr support for police, Gestapo, and SS in carrying out the terror measures directed against the SA. Thus it was not one company of the SS Leibstandarte that was transported to Munich and Bad Wiessee with trucks from a Reichswehr transport detachment; rather, there were about 1,500 men accommodated in four different barracks in Munich, as well as a Sturmabteilung of the SS that had been received in a barracks complex of the II Battalion of the 19th Bavarian Infantry Regiment. Not only small SS shock troops received weapons from the Reichswehr, but several SS units in Munich, Augsburg, and Kempten, which were supplied with rifles, hand grenades, and ammunition. The arming of the SS by local Reichswehr offices occurred in many places so generously that it had to be decreed that there should be "no excessive arming of the SS." In the territorial area of Bavarian Military District VII, army formations were held ready to intervene. At at least two locations, army officers actively participated in the disarming of the SA by SS and police.

Even though most members of the officer corps had welcomed the liquidation of the Reichswehr's rival, it was difficult to explain to them the murder of Bredow and Schleicher. Blomberg, who had accepted without contradiction that his predecessor in office Schleicher was brutally murdered, claimed to know nothing of it and repeatedly redirected attention to the advantages that had resulted for the Reichswehr from the destruction of the SA. This did not seem entirely credible, since it was known that Schleicher and Blomberg were old enemies.

Blomberg had already expressed himself unambiguously on 5 July 1934 to the military district commanders: "It was unavoidably necessary that with the blow against the mutineers of the SA, a blow also be struck against the circles that today one usually calls 'reaction.' This 'grasp to the Right' was also necessary in the interest of the Wehrmacht. We, the Wehrmacht, were to be shifted, according to the will of these circles, into a camp in which we cannot stand. Against Schleicher and his middlemen this blow was struck with great sharpness. A victim has also fallen in Papen's circle," Herbert von Bose, the author notes.

Using the term “cleansing” popular after the Röhm crisis, he continues: “The cleansing action is by no means concluded. The Führer will drive forward the process of recovery with iron will and ruthlessness. He fights against corruption, against perverse morality, criminal ambition, and for state and people. For the Führer, the most graphic expression of the state is the Wehrmacht. Not least in its interest has he acted in this way, and it is the duty of the Wehrmacht to thank him for this through, if possible, still greater loyalty and devotion.”

The War Minister justified the murder of the officers by claiming that Schleicher had maintained treasonous connections with Ernst Röhm and with foreign countries, and held out the prospect of evidence for Schleicher’s guilt, which however could never be produced. Schleicher, according to Blomberg’s version of the general’s murder, had been shot during arrest because he resisted with a weapon. He forbade the General Staff to take part in the burial of the former Reichswehr Minister. Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord was the only one to defy this order, furious and sad over the circumstances of the death of his old friend.

For months there were differences of opinion and discussions within the Reichswehr because of the liquidation of Schleicher and Bredow. The members of the Schlieffen Association, to which Bredow and Schleicher had also belonged, demanded a military-judicial investigation of the case and sought a posthumous rehabilitation of the murdered generals. The list with the names of those shot remained, if one follows Wilhelm Keitel’s memoirs, in Blomberg’s safe. Finally, on 2 April 1935, he published a statement from which it could be gathered that, despite contrary rumors, he was not considering any rehabilitation.

For Blomberg, the day of reckoning with the Schlieffen pupils had come, and he issued the following order to the higher command authorities and offices of the army: “I request (...) that the following communication be made known immediately and word for word to all officers of the Wehrmacht: The internal handling of the question (...) of Schleicher and von Bredow has in many cases created the impression that a rehabilitation of the two generals was intended and carried out. This is a misunderstanding. Solely for association purposes the Schlieffen Association was permitted the announcement of the following wording: ‘As far as the death of the named generals is concerned, it has been established that (...) they entered upon paths that were regarded as hostile to the government and therefore led to the fatal consequences. Through further investigation of the matter we would enter the political field, which according to our statutes is closed to the Graf Schlieffen Association.’”

Reichenau’s role in connection with Schleicher’s murder appears in a very dark light through the proof that he himself drafted the text of the report which claimed Schleicher had been shot because of resistance. The major general is then supposed to have explained that Schleicher’s shooting remained regrettable, but every revolution had its blemishes. In an interview by the French journalist Stanislaus de la Rochefoucauld for the *Petit Journal*, he declared that Schleicher had long since ceased to be a soldier. “He was a born conspirator. (...) He forgot that obedience is the first military commandment.”

The position of Blomberg and Reichenau toward Schleicher and Bredow, more than the instruction to support the SS units, had the consequence that the Reichswehr leadership lost further credibility and reputation among the general officer corps. The elimination of the SA had indeed ended the tensions between army and SA, but it further intensified the smoldering army-immanent conflict between Army Command and Reichswehr leadership — those Diadochi struggles — so that the armed power moved in a vacuum of mistrust and dissent typical of the National Socialist system.

State Secretary Bernhard von Bülow gave the Chief of the Truppenamt a very precise picture of

reactions abroad: disgust, horror, and greatest concern for the foreign-political future of Europe. Blomberg, however, forbade Beck further contact with Bülow. He did not want to realize the reflexes to German military policy. Not only did the self-assessment he repeatedly expressed of his “foreign-political caution” run counter to this behavior; it also shows to what a high degree Blomberg’s thinking contained contradictions — contradictions that cannot be resolved with the catchwords dialectic and ambivalence.

The mixture characteristic of him — purpose-oriented military departmental egoism and a selective perception of Hitler on the emotional basis of believing reverence — let him become step by step the military alliance partner of the dictator and tied him, and the Reichswehr, in the period following the Röhm putsch ever more closely to the person of Hitler. Precisely after the elimination of the power factor SA, the possibility seemed now to open for the War Minister, through strengthening his “embrace tactic,” of making the army into a determining factor in the state, the second pillar beside the Party.

Klaus-Jürgen Müller can explain Blomberg’s and Reichenau’s conduct during and after the bloody coup of 30 June 1934 quite plausibly in a kind of “sorcerer’s apprentice theory.” He thinks that before 30 June 1934 they were perhaps not precisely informed how and to what extent the action against Röhm’s people would be carried out, and were then surprised and frightened by the reality of the actual terror; but, “caught in their concept,” they became ever more “entangled in its meshes,” and thus became “knowing participants and helpers in evil machinations.” “Once they had bet on Hitler, they could no longer go back — presumably they did not want to either — and thus they had to accept the consequences.”

Blomberg, who had “bet on Hitler,” in fact did not want to go back. In his memoirs he explains that after the Röhm putsch what mattered to him above all was to consolidate permanently the newly won power position. With a special entente with Hitler, he wanted to consolidate domestically the military-political victory over the SA. The “two pillars” — Reichswehr and Party — were now to merge into a “unity.” He writes: “Until now Wehrmacht and Party had stood alongside one another as two pillars of the state. Now both parts were to be brought together to the point of fusion. The logical consistency of this striving was unmistakable in view of the direction toward totality of our state as represented by the Party.”

In his New Year’s message to the armed power, which was published in the military press, the War Minister summarized the events of the year 1934. Here too, as one of the central points, appears the concept of the “unity” proclaimed by him between people and armed power, now united in the spirit of National Socialism.

Blomberg, and this becomes clear from these words, made a cardinal error in 1934: he did not realize that the balance of the Wehrmacht pillar had already more than begun to waver. Abroad the circumstances were assessed differently, and soon there appeared in the German exile press the rumor that Blomberg wanted to resign as War Minister. Special symbolic significance was attached in this context to his alleged retreat into a sanatorium in autumn 1934 and Hitler’s twice appearing there.

Blomberg, however, did not think of resignation. He believed in the force of his vision of “unity” between army and state and in the omnipotence of military strength, while he underestimated Hitler’s drive toward his own and other visions, in which Blomberg was no more than an instrument. He ignored, with — as Norbert Frei thinks — frightening intransigence, the long-term weakening of the military and celebrated his triumph over Röhm: a Pyrrhic victory. Hitler’s decision for the Reichswehr

was not a decision for the only possible “military solution,” as Blomberg believed; it was a skillful move both to checkmate the powerful SA and to press the Reichswehr into dependence and subordination.

In an interview that he gave on 10 January 1935 to the American journalist Louis Lochner, the minister showed himself convinced that the function of the Reichswehr as “sole bearer of arms of the nation” and the subordinate role of the SA and SS had been established by the events of 30 June.

And yet: the real winner of the Röhm affair was the SS. With Hitler’s cancellation of its subordination to the SA, it stepped out of the shadow of a rather weakened Reichswehr in order to build that system of rule which after the war was called the “SS state.” From 20 July 1934 onward, the SS was answerable only to Hitler alone. On 24 September 1934, in a “decree on the establishment of the SS-Verfügungstruppe,” Blomberg paved the way for incorporation of the still embryonic SS-Verfügungstruppe into the Wehrmacht’s mobilization planning, thereby in the long term putting at stake the position of the traditional armed forces as the sole bearers of arms in the Reich.

Blomberg writes on this in his memoirs: “After the Röhm affair (...) Hitler’s SS was rewarded for its loyal conduct through a number of expansions that introduced its fateful rise to power. It was authorized to create three new units for the purpose of suppressing internal unrest. There were three infantry regiments without heavy weapons, the precursors of the Waffen-SS. There was no connection between them and the regular army. But as a consequence of this step I had to fight a constant struggle against Himmler, who wanted to enlarge his Waffen-SS. Hitler always decided such disputes in my favor.”

Ultimately, in 1934, Blomberg pointed the sinister but still small Praetorian Guard toward a development that was to make the SS the all-decisive ideological weapon in the arsenal of the Hitler state. The full significance of this measure, however, was to become recognizable only long after Blomberg’s departure — at the latest with the failed assassination attempt of 20 July 1944. When Blomberg was overthrown in 1938, there were still only three SS regiments. From then on they were expanded at top speed into divisions.

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ALLY OF HIS GRAVEDIGGERS (1934–1945)

THE ALTAR OF THE FATHERLAND IS REDECORATED

The condition of the aged Reich President Hindenburg had greatly worsened in the weeks before and after the Röhm crisis. When Hitler had himself flown to Neudeck, to Hindenburg’s estate, on 1 August 1934, the former hero of Tannenberg was already dying. Hindenburg, who was mentally completely confused and took Hitler for the Kaiser, was, according to the Weimar Constitution — whose most important articles had already been suspended — *de iure* still commander-in-chief of the Reichswehr.

On the morning of 2 August 1934 the last icon of the Weimar Republic died. On the same day, by Reich law, the office of Reich President was combined with that of Reich Chancellor, and Hitler thereby simultaneously assumed supreme command over the Wehrmacht. From then on he did not call himself “Reich President,” but “Führer and Reich Chancellor.” The title of Reich President, he argued,

was inseparably connected with the name of the “great dead man.”

As minister of the German Reich, Blomberg had placed his signature on the legal certification of this change, on the “Law Concerning the Head of the German Reich” of 1 August 1934. This law stated that upon Hindenburg’s death Hitler would automatically become commander-in-chief of the armed forces. According to Paragraph 1 of the law, “the office of Reich President shall be combined with that of Reich Chancellor,” and consequently “the previous powers of the Reich President shall pass to the Führer and Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler.” Furthermore, “Hitler determines his deputy.” Thus the Reichswehr suddenly stood under the “Bohemian corporal” whom it had originally wanted to use for its own purposes.

Hindenburg had wanted to find his final resting place at Neudeck. Hitler ordered — against this express wish — a state funeral for the “field-marshal substitute-emperor.” In a chiefs’ meeting in the Reich Propaganda Ministry, already on the afternoon of his death, the symbolically charged Tannenberg Memorial in East Prussia, Tannenberg/Grunwald, was designated as the burial place. The proposal came from Goebbels and found Hitler’s personal support, for the staging of National Socialist rule included the play with rituals, images, and memories. Hindenburg’s burial was, according to the historian Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, “the last ceremony with which Hitler carried the Weimar Republic to the grave.”

The monument, built in 1927 by the Krüger brothers in memory of the battle of the same name in the First World War, had an important function as backdrop for the National Socialist military and death cult. In gloomy stagings of memory of the dead of the First World War, in the play with people’s longing and emotions, Hitler was able, within the imposing walls of the monument, to instrumentalize the glory and myth of the army for the staging of his own power. On the so-called “first day of Tannenberg,” on 27 August 1933, he had obtained a public-effective joint appearance with Hindenburg. The “second day of Tannenberg” was already Hindenburg’s burial. On the night of 7 August his body was transferred from Neudeck to the Tannenberg Memorial. Along the roughly one-hundred-kilometer route that the coffin had to travel from Neudeck to Grunwald, members of the Reichswehr, SA, SS, Hitler Youth, and Kyffhäuser League formed a ghostly scenario in a torch-lined cordon. Ten thousand people came to the burial ceremony, in order to be able to take part in the spectacle, making pilgrimage past a rigid row of Reichswehr soldiers with arms raised in salute. The ceremony, a mixture of military honor, religious rite, and pagan cult, was broadcast as a media event over all transmitters throughout the Reich. Hitler’s speech at Hindenburg’s coffin sounded like the score of a Wagner opera: “Today the nation (...) has led the dead aged hero back to the great battlefield of his unique victory. Here (...) the weary commander shall find his rest (...). Dead commander, enter now into Valhalla!”

On the day of Hindenburg’s burial, the “second day of Tannenberg,” the old Prussian regiments with their Reichswehr steel helmets and the symbolism of the Iron Cross still dominated the image. The reinterment of Hindenburg in a burial crypt specially designed for him in the national monument, the “third day of Tannenberg,” only one year later — on 2 October 1935 — already bore the unmistakable features of the military self-staging of the National Socialist state. Blomberg had an essential share in the fact that the image of the army had changed in so decisive a way in only one year — both through the policy of indoctrination and opening, and through his omnipresence as principal actor on the stage of the National Socialist military cult, which through the National Socialist weekly newsreels could be indirectly experienced throughout the entire Reich.

He himself was a decisive component of this visual language, for as War Minister he personified the primordial power of the military. Thus for a large part of the audience in the staging of the Hitler myth

he was a decisive identification figure — all the more because he embodied the type of the Wilhelmine officer of the old stamp, which implied a fusion of the past with the present and the possible future. This had, as is well known, first shown itself effectively on the Day of Potsdam, 12 March 1933, when Hitler, in a symbolically charged spectacle, staged the fusion between state and military power, between old and new.

Hitler knew of Blomberg's function as an "heirloom of the past" and promoted the cult around his Defense or War Minister, since he needed him both as actor before the backdrop of the staging of the military state and as architect, imagologist, of a specifically National Socialist self-presentation of the military. The dictator missed no opportunity to honor Blomberg and to show himself side by side, "arm in arm," with him. If one looks at films and photographs of public events from the years 1933 to 1938, it is striking that Blomberg can be seen at Hitler's right side at hardly any staging absent. The body language of both men is clear: the "two-pillar symbolism" found its visual realization and shaped public perception of the National Socialist state. Blomberg, however, did not seem to see that for Hitler he was thereby becoming more and more a mere extra.

In the program of the National Socialists' military cult of the dead, and in the National Socialist festive calendar, the celebration of Heroes' Memorial Day had a special function. In 1933 the previous Volkstrauertag, Day of National Mourning, 16 November, was celebrated for the first time as Heroes' Memorial Day and was anchored as a holiday by a law of 28 February 1934. The Defense Minister took part already from 1933 in the annually recurring ritual, which above all in Berlin was staged with special ceremony. The entire Wehrmacht was for the first time present in a decisive way at the Heroes' Memorial Day celebration of the year 1935. Each year Blomberg gave on this occasion an emphatic speech in which he sought to bring the Wehrmacht into harmony with National Socialism. After the ceremony in the Linden Opera, in which the sounds of the *Eroica* were heard, he went, together with the aged General Field Marshal Mackensen and flanking Hitler, to lay a wreath at the memorial, the Neue Wache.

In a Heroes' Memorial Day speech of 1935, Blomberg spoke about the new "Law Concerning the Building-up of the Wehrmacht" and about the introduction of universal military service. These were the "foundation for the security of the Reich" (...). "In unconditional trust in the Führer we see the seed ripening: a state of unity, of strength, and of honor; a people in peace in a pacified Europe." A great spectacle, as Goebbels also thought, who as Propaganda Minister knew the magic of imagology and the significance of the public profession of faith by the Wehrmacht.

When Blomberg first participated on 9 November 1933, in Wehrmacht uniform beside Hitler and Göring, in the march of the "Old Fighters" in memory of the historic march to the Feldherrnhalle on 9 November 1923, Hitler will not have seen the invitation to take part in this march only as a very special distinction, which Blomberg — who really was no "Old Fighter" — could not refuse. The inclusion of Blomberg in the circle of the "Old Fighters" had symbolic significance and may also have contributed to transporting his image as a National Socialist adherent before 1933 and to nourishing the rumor that he had already been acquainted with Hitler before his appointment as minister.

In connection with Blomberg's role, his concept of tradition is illuminating. He never regarded traditions as a static force; they appeared to him significant and usable only against the background of their necessary transformation. Thus he succeeded in joining the Austrian field marshal Eugene of Savoy, 1663–1736, to Adolf Hitler; he succeeded in constructing a connection between Scharnhorst and Hitler. In the *Militärwissenschaftliche Rundschau* in 1936 he cemented this view, which had already existed after the First World War, not only in his "reckoning" with the Reich War Archive: "Traditions

do not consist in repeating history or turning it back; on the contrary, they consist in their conscious driving forward and continuation (...)."

From the fusion of the old with the new there resulted a "new" type of soldier, who nevertheless stood in the tradition of the old army, and in this Blomberg agreed with Hitler. The interpretation of the Reichswehr was directed here toward a particular interpretation of the concept of the front fighter. This concept received significance as a connecting link between the army since 1914 and the National Socialist movement. In a picture volume published in 1935 on the Day of the Wehrmacht in Nuremberg, Blomberg wrote in the foreword: "And when, on the order of the Führer and Reich Chancellor, the Honor Cross for Front Fighters was attached to the flags and standards of the old army, then the entire Wehrmacht greets in this act the visible sign of the inseparable bond between front-fighter spirit and the new Germany."

In the same year, in a festive speech at the Berlin State Opera, Blomberg described the Wehrmacht as creator of the "foundation walls" of a new state, on which a "God-sent master builder," Hitler, could build. He stated: "In the Führer of the National Socialist German Workers' Party and in the figure of Field Marshal von Hindenburg there met symbolically those two streams of force which, born in the front experience of the First World War, strove on separate paths toward the common goal." Those two "streams of force" could be personified in Blomberg and Hitler. In the draft of an officially commissioned Blomberg biography, which because of the Wehrmacht crisis of 1938 was never completed, it says tellingly: "Two soldiers stand opposite one another [Blomberg and Hitler]: a simple lance corporal with the Iron Cross First Class, and a general with the Pour le Mérite. Each has the greatest respect for the other and the greatest trust in the other."

The content and motivation of the special historical view of the Reichswehr leadership come to expression in a hymnic article in the official Militär-Wochenblatt on the occasion of Hitler's forty-fifth birthday. Under the heading "The Resurrection of the German Front Soldier," it states that the "National Socialist revolution" had already begun in August 1914; it had been "interrupted and betrayed" in 1918, but it survived not least thanks to "the selfless devotion to duty of the small, firmly joined Wehrmacht," which, with the defense associations and the Hitler movement, marched "on separate paths" but toward one and the same goal. From this emerges clearly the interpretation of the new soldier propagated by the Reichswehr leadership: "From the spirit of German front soldierhood National Socialism grew. For it, it conquered power in the German people and state. The unfinished German revolution of 1914 found, with the National Socialist rising of 1933, its historical shaper in the 'great speaker and doer of the nameless German front soldiers,' Adolf Hitler." What was taking place in National Socialist Germany was nothing other than "the transfer of front-soldierly valuation and morality to all public life. The eternally valid basic virtues of German soldiers (...) form the core of the National Socialist worldview."

"With pride," Blomberg wrote in his laudation of Hitler, "we soldiers are conscious that the movement in its origin goes back to the soldierly experience of the war. The fighting community of life and death, which once bound all outside there in the trenches of the front, was at the same time the birth hour of the great idea to whose victory you [Hitler, the author notes] have helped. Therefore the soldier feels himself, from his innermost feeling, one with the new state. The wartime volunteer of Regiment List [Hitler, the author notes], who once fought and bled in our ranks, from the first Battle of Flanders to the bitter end, the front fighter of the World War (...) is and remains forever one of ours."

Whether Blomberg really believed in the "resurrection of the German front soldier" cannot be said; at least he knew of the binding function of the front-fighter concept, which also represented a legitimating

factor for the position of the armed power in the new state that the Reichswehr leadership was striving for. When the *Völkischer Beobachter* reported on 9 May 1934 that a French peasant, while plowing his field, had found the body of the poet Hermann Löns, a struggle broke out over the authenticity of the “Löns bones” and their propaganda value. Although Löns and his work were not entirely uncontested in the Third Reich, the death in war, as in the cases of Theodor Körner or Alexander von Blomberg, had nevertheless ennobled him in a special way. Blomberg did not fail to recognize the possibility of glorifying in Löns the legendary “German front soldier” of the First World War. In writing, he informed Goebbels in June 1935: “In agreement with the Chief of the Reich Chancellery, I have resolved to carry out through the Wehrmacht, with the provision of a military honor company, the solemn burial of the soldier Hermann Löns ordered by the Führer and Reich Chancellor at the burial place determined by Frau Löns. In the person of Hermann Löns, the heroic spirit of the wartime-volunteer youth of 1914 shall be symbolically honored. I have envisaged 2 August 1935 as the day of burial.”

Blomberg had naturally not chosen the date for the burial ceremony by chance: exactly twenty-one years earlier the First World War had begun, and in the previous year, on exactly that day, General Field Marshal Hindenburg had died. Hermann Löns became in this ritual of the Wehrmacht, according to his biographer Thomas Dupke, a “symbolic figure for rearmament in the Third Reich,” for unconditional sacrifice in honor of the Fatherland.

Blomberg effectively translated into images the claiming of National Socialism for the “front spirit” and “soldierly values” — a remarkable reduction. On the occasion of Hitler’s forty-fifth birthday, the Defense Minister solemnly dedicated to the former lance corporal, as a “sign of loyalty” from the army, the barracks of Regiment List, I Battalion, 19th Bavarian Infantry Regiment, Hitler’s former regiment, which henceforth was called Adolf Hitler Barracks.

The propagation of the new image of the soldier found a forum in the institution of the Wehrmacht Academy, which was opened in Berlin on 1 October 1935 and, under the directorship of Wilhelm Adam, was directly subordinated to the Reich War Ministry and only indirectly to its mother, the War Academy. Planned as a training center for the next generation of a projected, but not realized, Wehrmacht General Staff, operational principles of an overall conduct of war were to be worked out and tested there under the direct control of the Reichswehr Ministry by especially capable officers of the army and navy. Blomberg saw in the Wehrmacht Academy both the completion of the training maxims of his teacher Reinhardt and an adaptation of the American War College, which had made a lasting impression on him during his journey to America in 1931, and he decisively influenced the curriculum of the Wehrmacht Academy. After his dismissal, the academy was closed again on 31 March 1938.

028

A CONSEQUENTIAL OATH (1934)

In order, as it were, to bring the army into outward agreement with National Socialism as well — to “redecorate the altar of the Fatherland” in Hitler’s sense — Blomberg had had a series of more than symbolic measures carried out. The most important and most consequential measure for the adaptation of the National Socialist cult was the reformulation of the flag oath, which was carried out while “Hindenburg’s corpse had not yet grown cold.” Already on the day of the Reich President’s burial, Blomberg had ordered the immediate swearing-in of the soldiers of the Wehrmacht to the “Führer of

the German Reich and people, Adolf Hitler.” On the same day the first units of the Reichswehr took the personal oath of loyalty. The whole procedure of swearing-in ran quickly, like a ghostly apparition, and seemed to have been prepared long in advance.

The new oath formula went back to a version by Reichenau, who for his part had commissioned Majors Foertsch and Röhricht with the preparation of a corresponding proposal, but then rejected the result and replaced it with his own formulation. Whoever may have formulated the oath — Foertsch and Röhricht, or, what is unusual, their superior, Major General von Reichenau — it would have been practically impossible for Blomberg to alter the text decisively. How could he have justified that, quite apart from the fact that such a thing could not have occurred to him, as he himself admitted.

The new oath formula, which, as Blomberg later explained, had been drafted without Hitler’s involvement and in all haste by Reichenau and his subordinates, had the following wording:

“I swear by God this holy oath,

that I will render unconditional obedience to the Führer of the German Reich and people, Adolf Hitler, the Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht, and that as a brave soldier I will be ready at any time to stake my life for this oath.”

The officers’ reaction to the new oath varied. The later General Eduard Wagner described in a letter to his wife the mood in Berlin on the morning of 2 August 1934: “Today at noon, 3 p.m., address by the Minister and swearing-in. Tonight at 8 p.m. a great military mourning ceremony in the Lustgarten.” Later he added: “Evening. Now that I have more quiet, I come to you. The swearing-in by the Chief of Army Command [General Werner von Fritsch, the author notes] was very brief. In general there is a rather oppressive mood. One simply has to hope.” Beck allegedly spoke of the “blackest day of his life.” The majority of officers, however, scarcely thought about the consequences of the oath of loyalty. Some military men attached to tradition, among them the Chief of Army Command Werner von Fritsch, believed that the new oath restored the kind of relationship that had existed under the Kaiser. That was of course anachronistic, for Blomberg — and with him Reichenau too — thought in other categories, categories obeying modern power-political premises and not the ghosts of the past.

Hermann Foertsch, Blomberg’s press chief in the Reichswehr Ministry, had dealt very thoroughly with the oath and its significance in history and had not allowed the slightest trace of inner opposition, or even reservations, to be recognized: “The strongest mutual bond of loyalty for the soldier is the oath. It is the foundation of all soldierly loyalty, which permits no interpretation, no modification. Thus even doubt about loyalty to the oath is the gravest insult to the officer [...]. The oath of the German soldiers is sworn to the Führer and Reich Chancellor, the Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht. No conflicts of conscience are connected with this oath. No anonymous constitution, no empty concept, no interpretable formula is the object of this oath, but unconditional obedience to the one Führer who directs Germany’s destiny and embodies in his person people and Fatherland. The old-German loyalty of men and followers has, since the National Socialist revolution, again been raised to the moral foundation of German soldierly life. Whoever breaks it judges himself for all time.”

The then Lieutenant Colonel Foertsch — in 1950 he would be responsible for a draft of the internal structure of the new armed forces — had moreover in 1936, in an article saturated with National Socialist spirit, The Führer and the Wehrmacht, expressly emphasized that every soldier “with proud joy” wore “the sovereign emblem of the National Socialist movement on his tunic.” He had further stated: “The ‘duties of the German soldier’ are written out of the National Socialist spirit, just as the

flag oath expresses it,” which is then quoted word for word. The same Foertsch expressed himself critically after 1945 as follows: “It seems as if no one in the Wehrmacht leadership gave particular thought to the constitutional basis of this order [...]. Through the law passed by the government, the Reich Chancellor had thus made himself head of state and appointed himself Reich Chancellor.” But who could have known better about the underlying thoughts than Foertsch himself, since he had co-drafted the oath?

The Commander-in-Chief of the Kriegsmarine, Raeder, described in his memoirs his reasons for taking the oath as follows: “When Hitler, after Hindenburg’s death, took the place of the Reich President and thereby became Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht, I took the oath to him, at his request, together with Colonel General von Blomberg, General of Artillery Freiherr von Fritsch, and General of the Air Force Göring. Reservations about this did not come into question for me, any more than for the army officers. For Hitler had been called in legal fashion by Reich President von Hindenburg to be Reich Chancellor; the German people had repeatedly — with unanimity not previously experienced — declared their confidence in him; he could therefore, according to the general view, be regarded as Hindenburg’s legal successor. It had also become known that he had likewise been regarded by Hindenburg as his successor.” Raeder overlooked, however, that it was a matter of the formulation of the oath, the obligation to Hitler’s person.

After the Second World War Blomberg was reproached for the renewed swearing-in of the Reichswehr on the day of Hindenburg’s death as an irresponsible breach of loyalty toward the army. In fact, it was to prove a “consequential oath,” as Heinz Guderian, then colonel and chief of staff of the Motor Transport Troops Command, prophesied in a letter of 2 August 1934 to his wife. Hans-Bernd Gisevius speaks of a “cold coup d’état.” In his memory — always to be assessed with caution — “the Berlin garrison, deeply moved by Hindenburg’s death, was ordered to the nocturnal Königsplatz in order, by torchlight, to swear an oath to the new head of state.” For him it was entirely clear: “Hitler forced a loyalty oath upon the astonished officer corps, unto death” — more than that — “unto physical or moral suicide.” This “surprise attack” had “gone to Blomberg’s cost” [presumably Blomberg’s acceptance by the general officer corps is meant, the author notes].

Michael Freund holds the oath to be “invalid, impossible, and superfluous,” since a valid formula had existed and the soldiers had already been sworn to the constitution and Reich President. Only newly entering soldiers would have had to swear an oath, and Klaus-Jürgen Müller too speaks of a “coup-like act” that was to become “decisive and disastrous for the fate of the German armed forces,” of the oath to Hitler as an “agonizing, scarcely dissolvable fetter” for the military. Müller rightly emphasizes the connections between the events of 30 June 1934, the conservative opposition, and the succession question for the Reich President. Evidently people no longer wanted to run any risk; hence the “unseemly haste” and the “rushed swearing-in.” Müller assumes that at the cabinet meeting the day before, a corresponding “agreement” had been reached between Hitler and his loyal Blomberg. Kershaw too writes that Blomberg, shortly before Hindenburg’s death, presumably on 1 August 1934, discussed the oath with Hitler, who later publicly thanked him for it.

The origins of the thesis that there had been a “prearranged game” between Hitler and Blomberg are found in the following explanation by the then ambassador Franz von Papen: “Apparently Hitler had already agreed on 1 August with the Reichswehr Minister devoted to him that immediately after Hindenburg’s death the Reichswehr would be sworn to him, Hitler. There is otherwise technically no way to explain that already on 2 August the swearing-in — with a new formula — could be carried out in all garrisons. Here Blomberg therefore lent his hand to a further coup d’état.” [The first “coup d’état” is supposed to have consisted in the transfer of the previous rights of the Reich President to Hitler.]

That Blomberg had “in disregard of the Reich constitution (...) ordered the immediate and unconditional swearing-in of the entire Reichswehr to the person of Adolf Hitler” was a false conclusion, for the oath concerned by no means “constitution and Reich President,” but people and Fatherland. Moreover, the new swearing-in was triggered by the death of the Reich President and his succession by Adolf Hitler as “Supreme Commander of the Reichswehr.” The oath had also already been fundamentally modified on 1 December 1933 and read as follows: “I swear by God this holy oath that I will at all times serve people and Fatherland loyally and honestly and, as a brave and obedient soldier, be ready at any time to stake my life for this oath.”

Nor was the concentration of oath-taking on one person at the head of the state in any way new. In November 1933 the SS-Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler had been obligated personally to Hitler by the following oath, and the text may indeed have served as a model for the formulation of the oath of 1934: “I swear to you, Adolf Hitler, as Führer and Chancellor of the Reich, loyalty and bravery. I pledge obedience unto death to you and to the superiors appointed by you, so help me God.” At the end of 1932 another example had already gone through the German press, namely that the Wehrmacht of fascist Italy was to be sworn to Hitler’s model, the “Duce” Benito Mussolini: “In the name of God and Italy I swear to carry out the orders of the Duce without objection and with all my strength, if necessary also with blood, to serve the cause of the fascist revolution.”

The renewed swearing-in of the Reichswehr on 2 August 1934 was not such an unusual procedure as is often presented. The swearing-in of the Reichswehr to Hitler belonged to the concept of merging the offices and thus lay in the consequence of the law of 1 August 1934. Thus one cannot say that Blomberg independently proposed the oath to Hitler. Of course, he also did not speak against it, but hoped, through especially rapid action, to rise further in Hitler’s favor, with the help of this personalized declaration of loyalty to intensify his special relationship of trust with Hitler, and to consolidate the predominance of the Reichswehr as the power center of the Third Reich. Reichenau then expressed the function of the oath with the following words: “We need the oath to consolidate our positions.” In this, however, both overlooked that the initiative for the military oath to Hitler and consent to the assumption of the office of Reich President increased the totalitarian claim of the Party — which they thought precisely to control through their action.

After Joseph Goebbels, in the weekly newspaper *Das Reich* after the tragedy of 20 July 1944, had described the soldiers’ flag oath as a “bond of duties with National Socialism,” Blomberg, in his private notes, turned against this view with the following clarification: “We had formed the flag oath in the OKW without having an order from the Führer to do so and without having asked him for advice. He probably trusted our will and our way. We swore the flag oath for Hitler as the Führer of the German people, but not as the head of the National Socialist Party. That was what he also was for us soldiers, and we leaders wanted to bring Wehrmacht and Party together and place them shoulder to shoulder, but no one thought that our flag oath should amount to a bond of duties with the National Socialist Party. This view was a later and one-sidedly formed addition.” Here once again appears Blomberg’s inability to distinguish between the “Party leader Hitler,” the “Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht,” and the “Führer of the German people” — a dilemma that persisted throughout the entire period of the Third Reich. To Waldemar Erfurth this “attempt at justification” by Blomberg sounded “rather weak and not very convincing.” Against this one must object that, if Blomberg had wanted to “justify” himself, he could have invoked Hitler’s demand instead of burdening the OKW with it.

On 19 August 1934 the political events from the beginning of the month received their ritual confirmation by plebiscite. According to official figures, 89.9 percent of the votes cast were in favor of

Hitler, as head of state, head of government, Party leader, and Supreme Commander of the armed forces, now possessing constitutionally unrestricted powers. On 20 August 1934 Hitler, Reich Interior Minister Frick, and Blomberg signed the Law Concerning the Swearing-in of Officials and Soldiers of the Wehrmacht and thereby gave the new oath its legal validity.

Hitler had recognized with pleasure that the oath-binding of the Wehrmacht to him personally simultaneously involved the political coordination of the army. That was more than he could expect from his Wehrmacht Minister and prompted him to take the unusual step of a kind of public thanksgiving, with which he at the same time solicited trust: “Today [20 August 1934, the author notes], after the law of 3 August [1934] has been confirmed by the German people, I wish to say thanks to you [Blomberg] and through you to the Wehrmacht for the oath of loyalty sworn to me as its Führer and Commander-in-Chief. Just as the officers and soldiers of the Wehrmacht have obligated themselves to the new state in my person, so I will at all times regard it as my sacred duty to stand up for the existence and inviolability of the Wehrmacht, in fulfillment of the testament of the immortal General Field Marshal [Hindenburg] and faithful to my own will to anchor the army as the sole bearer of arms in the nation.”

This “oath of loyalty” and the self-obligation made by Hitler in response to it were responsible reasons why Hitler left the Wehrmacht leadership a free hand in personnel and material respects until 1938 and refrained from any intervention. That, however, was then to change thoroughly with the thunderclap of the Blomberg scandal at the beginning of 1938.

029

HITLER PLAYS VABANQUE — THE WAR MINISTER HAS CONCERNS

After Hindenburg’s death and the securing of power internally, there began the process of “cumulative radicalization” characteristic of the National Socialist regime. The Führer state had taken firm shape. Hitler directed his attention to foreign-policy factors and began the political game of vabanque connected with them. Already in 1935, the renaming of the “Reichswehr Minister” as “War Minister” had to seem programmatic and alarming at home and abroad. Germany’s withdrawal from the League of Nations, the military occupation of the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland on 7 March 1935, and the reintroduction of universal military service on 16 March, which now followed, were perceived with concern at home and abroad as increasing the risk of war.

Blomberg writes in his keyword-like notes from 1943/44 concerning this development: “Each of these steps carried with it a danger of war (...). A war before the completion of rearmament would mean a catastrophe for Germany. Rearmament had on the one hand to be pursued so rapidly that the dangerous weakness of the Reich would be remedied as soon as possible; on the other hand, however, so carefully that foreign-policy conflicts because of this rearmament would be avoided. Who could overlook that Germany’s rebirth since 1933 awakened the strongest forces in us, but at the same time called up and gathered strong resistance in the rest of the world. It seemed to me that among us there existed an inclination to underestimate the strength of the opponents, and that our impatience would lead to a premature knotting-up of conflicts. I never forget that the First World War was lost because the burden of our enemies’ superior power became too heavy for our shoulders; for in the main it came down to that, whatever interpretation has been given since our defeat by factionalism (...). We had to stake

everything on gaining time, in order to let the frameworks of the Hitler Reich grow stronger and to drive forward military armament. Each year our trained reserves increased, the numbers of our active and reserve officers rose, national fortification grew, the Luftwaffe and fleet became stronger and more unified, and our industrial armament developed. The machine of general armament ran at full speed, but at that time still with consideration for civilian needs; (...). I and my closest collaborators were permitted at the end of 1937 to assume that an armed conflict, perhaps once unavoidable, still lay at a considerable distance before us. It seemed to us that we had every reason to let time work for us. We had nullified the military coercive provisions of the Versailles Treaty; the territorial provisions would without doubt follow. In our situation, facing an agitated political world, both alert readiness and waiting patience seemed required. Only the Anschluss question of Austria seemed already ripe for solution.”

Even if that characteristic mixture of realism and irrationality was a fixed component of the War Minister’s worldview, irrationalism in his reflections had reached its limits where it was a matter of a war beginning too early. On 16 March 1935 the situation was in any case “quite serious,” as Fritsch stated, and, as he knew, Blomberg too knew that “a struggle” in this situation could no longer be anything more than a “desperate self-defense.” In view of his own aggressive armaments-policy course, Blomberg may indeed also have remembered the necessity of a prudent policy. He, and most army generals before 1939, were increasingly irritated and disturbed by the apparent vabanque game of the politician Adolf Hitler, who seemed to speculate carelessly on accidents and changing constellations in international politics, for they still stood under the lasting trauma of the defeat of 1918. From these considerations Blomberg will most likely really have drawn the consequence of “contradicting” Hitler. As he himself claims, he had seen statesmanlike qualities more “in patience and waiting” as opposed to the validity of “too stormy a will.” Witnesses claimed to have observed that Blomberg reacted with increasing nervousness to Hitler’s foreign-policy steps. In the course of the Rhineland occupation, according to Hossbach, he “suddenly, full of panic-like concern over a possible hostile reaction by France, repeatedly and insistently demanded the withdrawal of the three battalions transferred to Aachen, Trier, and Saarbrücken,” while the “Führer rebuked the weak nerves of his War Minister,” which unquestionably had their origins also in the reactions abroad. The German Wehrmacht attachés in London had considered it their duty, on the basis of impressions gained in England, to emphasize in a telegram to the War Ministry the danger of war that in their view existed. Blomberg, however, in the end sharply reprimanded the worried attachés in London. Whether this proves his fundamental agreement with Hitler’s course, as Müller thinks, is doubtful, for Blomberg could under no circumstances have shown his rejection of Hitler’s course to the German attachés.

The news that Hitler wanted to introduce universal military service was received by Blomberg, according to Hossbach, with horror, and he opposed Hitler’s decision on political grounds. Apart from increasing differences in individual questions, the Army Command also shared these concerns of the War Minister. This rejecting attitude by Blomberg toward the introduction of military service would, however, have stood in diametrical contradiction to his previous positive evaluation of military service and his revisionist aims — it is therefore more than improbable. In addition, at this point there was broad consensus in the German public on the necessity of military service. When Hitler, in the shadow of the success of the Saar plebiscite and its reattachment to the German Reich on 1 March 1935, proclaimed the introduction of universal military service in a declaration “To the German People” on 16 March 1935, the War Minister had in any case dropped any possible reservations. One day after the reintroduction of military service, on 17 March 1935, he proclaimed: “By the Reich government yesterday announcing the Law Concerning the Building-up of the German Wehrmacht, with which universal military service is reintroduced, the foundation for the security of the Reich has been created. For the domestic and foreign-political life of our people, however, the German Wehrmacht is in the

process of again becoming what it once was and what it must be: internally, a school of the nation for the education of our youth in the spirit of military capacity and sacrificial love of the Fatherland; externally, the fully equal and equally capable guardian and watcher of the Reich.”

The appeal to the army as the “school of the nation” had been, since the time of the Wars of Liberation, a popular recipe in times of war and crisis for the legitimation of present striving for power. As has already been shown, memories of the “glorious time” had again begun to ferment in the minds of the military men after 1919. Thus the War Minister drew from this fund of collective memories and legitimized the introduction of military service entirely out of the spirit of the Prussian reformers. In a decree of 16 April 1935 it says: “When Prussia 130 years ago set about the reconstruction of its army after defeat, a royal ordinance said that general military conscription would in future place young people of good upbringing and fine sense of honor under the flag as common soldiers. Gneisenau at that time enforced the ‘freedom of the back’; Scharnhorst’s whole striving aimed at ‘raising and enlivening the spirit of the army, fusing the army and the nation more intimately, and giving it direction toward its most essential and great destiny.’ In the new army Scharnhorst saw ‘the unification of all moral and physical forces of all citizens of the state.’ On the basis of these demands, Boyen then made the army into the great educational school of the nation. Today we stand before the same task.” Blomberg instructed his collaborators in the Reichswehr Ministry, in relation to foreign neighbors, to create the impression of a strong Wehrmacht. Hitler thanked his faithful minister for this shift onto his line. In a letter of thanks, he emphasized, entirely in Blomberg’s sense, his intention “to anchor the army as the sole bearer of arms in the nation.”

Despite the forced rearmament, Hitler justified to Ward Price, correspondent of the English Daily Mail, the restoration of German military sovereignty as a “moral act” rather than as a “militarily necessary” one.

On 21 May 1935 the Reich Cabinet passed the new German Defense Law. The Reichswehr Ministry was renamed the Reich War Ministry; the new designation of the Reichswehr Minister was now “Reich War Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht.” The structure of the new German Wehrmacht resulting from the Defense Law removed the old designations “Reichswehr” and “Reich Army” and replaced them with the new concepts “Army,” “Kriegsmarine,” and “Luftwaffe.” The structure of the army was organized into three groups, Berlin, Kassel, and Dresden, with several corps, and into ten military districts: Königsberg, Stettin, Berlin, Dresden, Stuttgart, Münster, Munich, Breslau, Kassel, and Hamburg. The Kriegsmarine had its fleet command in Kiel, with the North Sea command post in Wilhelmshaven and the Baltic Sea command post in Kiel. The Luftwaffe received six air districts: Königsberg, Berlin, Dresden, Münster, Munich, and Kiel. Article 1 of the Defense Law read: “Military service is honorary service to the German people. Everyone is subject to military service. In war, beyond military service, every German man and every German woman is obligated to service for the Fatherland.” The Defense Law names army, Kriegsmarine, and Luftwaffe as armed forces, and the “Führer and Reich Chancellor as Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht.” The fixing of the strength of the peacetime army — navy and air force were not mentioned at all in this connection — at thirty-six divisions was the public fixation of the planning goal worked out in the preceding years in the Reichswehr Ministry and in the Army Command. In March 1935 the Wehrmacht leadership had twenty-one divisions, which, however, had not yet reached their full personnel and material strength. Around 280,000 men were under arms, but of the 189 infantry battalions envisaged for the final expansion of the twenty-one-division army, only 109 had been formed. The two tank battalions possessed only twelve armored fighting vehicles. The formation of three further infantry divisions planned for autumn 1935 was the first step on the path to the armament goal of a thirty-six-division peacetime army. This step became possible through the takeover of the barracked state police forces in

a strength of about 56,000 men. A decree by Blomberg of 8 February 1934 had ordered that, in the event of war, the state police forces would come under the command of the Army Command. Their open takeover into the Wehrmacht had already been initiated by an instruction from Hitler in January 1935 and now took place in several stages.

Before the Reichstag, Hitler justified Germany's position in military policy that day. In thirteen points he set out his foreign-policy positions: "If Germany today stands up for peace, then it stands up for it neither from weakness nor from cowardice; it stands up for peace from another conception, which National Socialism possesses of people and state." Contrary to the initial fears of the War Minister and other generals, the introduction of military service, apart from official protests from England, France, and Italy and a few critical newspaper comments, provoked no noteworthy reactions. Hitler's self-confidence toward the Wehrmacht leadership had thereby risen dangerously.

On 6 December 1935 the Reich Defense Committee, under the chairmanship of General Keitel, decided on the accelerated construction of the Wehrmacht and the availability of the entire nation in the event of emergency. Further military planning envisaged a rapid enlargement of the previous 100,000-man army into a peacetime army of twelve corps commands and thirty-six divisions with 550,000 men. The construction of the thirty-six divisions was to be completed by 1939.

030

A WAR-UNWILLING WAR MINISTER?

In October 1936 Blomberg made a northern voyage on the Grille, the aviso of the Reich Navy. Hitler did not come along, since he was withdrawing more and more and in any case found everything maritime repellent, which went so far that he developed an aversion even to global questions of naval planning. Among those present on board were Blomberg's important collaborators at this time: the chief of the Department of National Defense in the Reichswehr Ministry, Lieutenant Colonel Alfred Jodl; Lieutenant Colonel Hermann Foertsch, who directed public-relations work; as well as Blomberg's adjutants, Chief Adjutant Major Georg von der Decken, Army; Lieutenant Commander Hubert Freiherr von Wangenheim, Navy; and First Lieutenant Karl Boehm-Tettelbach, Luftwaffe. Guests on board were Blomberg's sons Henning and Axel.

On the warship, which according to Blomberg no one except Hitler and himself could use without permission, the War Minister could recover and collect himself away from the hectic Berlin operation in the circle of his closest collaborators, in order to plan the coming great Wehrmacht maneuver and to think about his favorite theme, the future and timely inner structure and top-level organization of the Wehrmacht. When the Grille tied up again in Kiel on 13 October 1936, the framework had been set for the great Wehrmacht maneuver of 20 to 25 September 1937, in which the cooperation of the three parts of the Wehrmacht was to be tested for the first time. In June 1937 Blomberg issued the first "general directive for unified war preparation of the Wehrmacht," of which more will be said. The indignation in the High Command of the Army was considerable.

On 20 September 1937 the great autumn maneuvers began. At Blomberg's invitation, the Chief of the British General Staff, Sir Devereux, the Italian Chief of the General Staff Marshal Badoglio, Mussolini, as well as the Hungarian minister and Infantry General Roeder also took part. In the north German area a large-scale air-defense exercise with blackout took place, while in Berlin air-raid alarm with siren

howls was practiced and, for a week, air attacks with fires and gas employment were repelled. The results of the de facto only great Wehrmacht maneuver of the Third Reich, which was designed as a gigantic demonstration of its combat power, once more ignited the conflict over the top-level organization between Reichswehr leadership and Army Command, which, according to its line, did not believe in the feasibility of cooperation among all parts of the Wehrmacht. A war of memoranda between the departments began, carried out on Keitel's back and, nota bene, far away from Hitler. While in the years 1935–1937 the preparation of war planning was thus the chief moment of Blomberg's military policy, many foreigners and exiles connected entirely different thoughts with Blomberg.

Under the title “Blomberg Pacifist?” a newspaper in March 1936 quoted from a speech by the War Minister that he had given in the Berlin State Opera. There it says — ironically or actually hopefully — that Blomberg had given the impression “as if he were in the process of becoming more critical.” The War Minister had warned against cultivating “a fresh and cheerful romanticism of war” and said that he hoped and wished that “war as a means of politics and as a shaper of the destinies of peoples would disappear.” Phrases about the German will for peace were of course not new; the Wehrmacht leadership had tirelessly repeated them in speeches and decrees, and Hitler himself had continuously emphasized the “German will for peace” in his propaganda speeches before and during the Olympic Games of 1936. In the above-cited speech by Blomberg it also says in another place that “we do not want a war of aggression, but we do not fear a defensive war.”

Blomberg's Luftwaffe adjutant Karl Boehm-Tettelbach had informed himself thoroughly about the perception of German policy abroad and cautiously informed his superior of his knowledge. In his study of the English press, Boehm-Tettelbach came to a striking overall impression, which he summarized as follows: “If Blomberg, or whoever it may be, operates skillfully, Germany's further fate lies in his hands. [...]. Blomberg enjoyed a good reputation everywhere abroad.” This assessment, or overestimation, of Blomberg by the English press certainly contained no call for violent activities against the Hitler regime on the part of the general officer corps; rather, it was more a coded piece of advice directed to Blomberg and other leading military men, to expand their sphere of influence and to take part in shaping a prudent foreign policy — possibilities that Blomberg never seems to have seriously considered in a consistent way.

Not only abroad was Blomberg regarded as moderate in foreign policy. Goebbels evidently thought in the same direction, and while he had earlier often met privately with Blomberg and always described him as a “very nice fellow,” his attitude toward the General Field Marshal changed clearly around 1936. Here the beginning of German involvement in the Spanish Civil War can certainly be interpreted as a possible caesura. Since the beginning of the civil war, the insurgents had received massive support from National Socialist Germany. Blomberg, however, had at first approved this only hesitantly, which displeased Goebbels extraordinarily. In that may lie one decisive cause for the remarks, increasingly appearing since the end of 1936, by the Propaganda Minister about the “weak general officer corps” — above all Blomberg.

From Goebbels's notes it also emerges that he discussed his impressions of Blomberg with Hitler, who thought just as critically about the “cautiousness” of the general officer corps as his Propaganda Minister did. A first, hidden shadow had fallen over the relationship of trust between Blomberg and Hitler.

On the other hand, Hitler understood virtuously how to instrumentalize the positive image that people abroad had of Blomberg. He made use of his diplomatic skill by sending him, who already during the

Weimar period had had a semi-diplomatic function, on visits abroad. In 1937 three journeys were on the program: Italy, England, and Hungary.

Playing the diplomat was a role that Blomberg loved. He was enthusiastic about travel — as Goebbels condescendingly remarked, a “little travel uncle” — and possessed the necessary language skills, the appearance, the politeness, the charm, the knowledge, and the social standing to appear in person on behalf of improving German relations with foreign countries. In March 1937 Hitler appointed Blomberg, against Göring’s wishes and pressure, as head of the official German delegation at the coronation of George VI on 12 May 1937 in London. Since his participation in the Geneva Disarmament Conference in 1932, Blomberg had enjoyed a good reputation in Great Britain. He was Anglophile and for years had had the habit of reading English texts, mostly literature, for half an hour every day. His daughter Sybille shared her father’s passion for “Britishness,” which was also shown by the fact that she was allowed to go to a college in Oxford to study, where Blomberg liked to visit her.

Blomberg’s handwritten notes about the points that he was to address in England on Hitler’s commission prove that he was to promote British trust in the Hitler Reich and, in tactful fashion, allude to the return of the former German colonies. Furthermore, the minister was to form an image of England’s political attitude toward Germany and inspect the state of English armament. “Culture and money questions,” according to the minister’s notes, were “outside my competence.”

Thanks to the report of an English officer responsible for supervising the German delegation, Lieutenant Colonel Burrows, we possess a detailed outline of the course of Blomberg’s visit to England, from 9 to 20 May 1937, as well as an interesting assessment of the War Minister.

The German delegation arrived in Dover on 9 May, coming from Calais, in order to be received there by ten members of the German Embassy under the direction of Ernst Woermann, embassy councillor from 1936 to 1938 and Ribbentrop’s representative in London. On the same boat on which the German delegation was located, the papal envoys were also traveling. An unusually large crowd had gathered at Dover harbor. Burrows reports how impressed Blomberg showed himself by this large number of people, who, as he assumed, had come to greet him. When the visitors, however — despite heavy rain — fell to their knees and struck up “a kind of lament,” the minister had to recognize that the greeting was not directed at him but at the papal delegation, which had left the boat shortly after the German travelers. On the subsequent train journey in the saloon car to Victoria Station, Blomberg expressed his special pleasure at being allowed to represent the German nation at the coronation festivities and, on this occasion, to visit England. Already halfway there, however, the first verbal skirmishes between Blomberg and Burrows began. When the train stopped opposite a large advertisement for a British daily newspaper, Blomberg addressed the annoyance that, in his opinion, free expression in the British press caused. He explained that so long as the British press mocked Göring, Goebbels, and “the Führer,” the Germans could not maintain friendly relations with Great Britain. Burrows replied to the General Field Marshal that, since the German press was indeed controlled, it must surely be possible to prohibit the publication of excerpts from the British press containing such insults. Despite this “British” kind of free expression, the German visitors enjoyed very respectful and courteous treatment, which inspired Blomberg greatly, since at first he had even reckoned with demonstrations directed against him. Burrows notes that wherever Blomberg was — whether alone or accompanied, though unobtrusively guarded by Scotland Yard, in the hotel or at public events — he was always treated with the greatest respect. This is also confirmed by the notes of the adjutant Boehm-Tettelbach, who witnessed most of the conversations and meetings that Blomberg had in London: “There were critical remarks nowhere. Only the calls: ‘The Germans, the Germans!’”

At a reception in the German Embassy Blomberg met the British general officer corps, including Chief of the General Staff Sir William Ironside, whom he invited to Germany. In the same year Ironside was to take part in the great autumn maneuver of the Wehrmacht in Mecklenburg. During his visit Blomberg inspected military installations such as the Royal Tank Corps Centre in Bovington and the Air Warfare School at the airfield Andover, east of Salisbury. There the German officers were presented with light bombers and other allegedly newly developed aircraft of the Royal Air Force.

On 12 May the actual occasion of the journey took place — the traditional coronation ceremonial in Westminster Abbey. In his notes Blomberg describes the uplifting mood in the Abbey, which was overcrowded with people. He was allowed to regard his placing at the King's table at the following dinner as a good omen and an act of special political significance. "Naturally," he writes, "I did not take Britain's friendly attitude as directed toward my person, but toward the German Reich."

During his visit the War Minister had to complete an extensive "program" on the diplomatic parquet; this included numerous conversations with British politicians. He met with Foreign Minister Eden, with Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, and with Chancellor of the Exchequer Neville Chamberlain, who only a few days after his encounter with Blomberg, on 28 May, was to become Baldwin's successor. As before in conversation with Eden and Baldwin, Blomberg, in the centrally important discussion with Chamberlain on 14 May, assured him of Germany's will to cultivate friendly relations with England. Chamberlain replied that this wish likewise existed among a large part of English public opinion. Blomberg emphasized "that in Western Europe the difficulties could be resolved considerably more easily if everyone gave up the fiction of a German attack. The thought of such an attack was absurd (...)." Chamberlain pointed to the necessity of friendly cooperation in the economic field. In his view "one must be able to find a solution to the present difficulties considerably faster economically than in politics." Blomberg likewise acknowledged that economic cooperation between Germany and England was "extraordinarily desirable," but also emphasized that "the political side must not be neglected." The legation councillor keeping the protocol notes in conclusion: Neville Chamberlain behaved during the entire conversation "extraordinarily reservedly and took, in each case, a coolly waiting attitude toward the questions raised by the German side, without giving any suggestions of his own." Burrows was not present at that conversation between Blomberg and Chamberlain and received him again only afterward. In doing so he claims to have perceived, with irritation, that for the first time during his visit the War Minister was completely "out of tune." From the hints that the British officer could later extract from the interpreter of the German Embassy, who had represented Blomberg in the conversation with Chamberlain, he came to the firm conviction that "something was said or had occurred at this interview which definitely ruffled the Field-Marshal."

Burrows had the assignment of interviewing Blomberg on important points — his relationship to Hitler, attitude toward German Jewish policy, thoughts about Russia. While in such conversations Blomberg admitted that he was a great admirer of the American armed forces, he refused to make statements to the Briton about the German-Russian relationship. He showed himself less taciturn when asked about his relationship to Hitler. He explained that he had the most privileged access to the "Führer" and that the latter trusted him more than anyone else. Hitler would almost always follow his advice, and he, Blomberg, was certain that his visit to England would prove very valuable for both countries.

Despite this dangerously self-confident and also deceptive self-assessment by the German War Minister, at least as presented outwardly, Burrows gained the accurate impression that his admiration for "Herr Hitler" came very close to worship, and that one had to assume that, however strong Blomberg's power over the army might be, he would in the end always subordinate himself to Hitler's orders. Despite this precise perception, Burrows formulated in his report the conviction that Great

Britain had found in the General Field Marshal a sincere friend, and that his reception in England had contributed much to enabling him to convince Hitler that friendship with Great Britain was one of the most important aims to be pursued. In Boehm-Tettelbach's recollection, Blomberg's thoughts during the morning walks in London in fact "circled unceasingly around the possibility of improving German-English relations. The striving was toward 'progress towards appeasement,' and that was what Blomberg in his conversations with Englishmen, Frenchmen, and representatives of eastern states described as Hitler's aim."

At this point the question arises whether the War Minister really believed what he had wanted to suggest to the English during his visit — scarcely imaginable — and whether his assessments of British policy toward Germany corresponded with the content of the report that he wrote about the journey during the crossing aboard the ship that brought the delegation back to Wilhelmshaven on 20 May. Unfortunately, the report on his England stay, with which Blomberg drove to Hitler on the Obersalzberg immediately after his return, has not survived. The following conversations at the Berghof can be reconstructed only insofar as we are willing to believe the report of an eyewitness, Blomberg's adjutant, who continued to travel with him. According to this, his superior described to his "Führer" the cool conversations that he had conducted with Baldwin, Eden, and Chamberlain about German-English relations. The following day at the Berghof was also reserved for conversations between Hitler and Blomberg. This time Bormann too was present. They drove to the Kehlstein, the so-called tea house, which Hitler liked to visit in order to observe the mountain world with binoculars. Boehm-Tettelbach writes that Blomberg afterward hinted to him that "Hitler had accepted the bad news [about the conversations in England, the author notes] very calmly, or at least had not let anything show." This largely agrees with the notes that Blomberg prepared between 1943 and 1945. "Hitler's attitude toward me was not that of a military superior, but very much that of a man who did not command, but allowed himself to be persuaded, who calmly received objections and contradiction and took every consideration for the cause represented by me and for my person. (...) Regarding England (...) my confident judgment was apparently received with approving words." In fact the dictator appeared deliberately relaxed that May evening, and after dinner in the smallest circle demanded the showing of one of his beloved Rühmann films. On the third day Blomberg traveled back to Berlin in the afternoon, supplied by Hitler with "new directives for the expansion of the Wehrmacht." This was to have been Blomberg's last visit to Hitler's private fortress.

In later interrogation by the Allies, Blomberg testified about the conversations with Hitler that had taken place in these three days. He said that he had expressed to Hitler his impression of the necessity of a German-English alliance, but also his skepticism about its feasibility. He writes: "(...) In theory an understanding with England did not seem impossible; a series of conversations with politicians — ministers and potential ministers as well as others — dealt with this and showed prospects. In practice, however, this England wanted to give little and keep as much as possible, and Germany, by contrast, did not want to wait patiently for a slow development, indeed believed it could not wait. England and Germany, even if one presupposed good will on both sides, were moving through the force of circumstances rather apart from one another than that their paths would have met at some distant point. The most urgent reason seemed to me to be mutual mistrust. There was no settlement with France because England did not permit it. In contrast to my Geneva impressions of 1931/32, France was now entirely subordinated to England's influence."

It cannot be said what assessment of England Blomberg really reached in May 1937, how he conveyed his views to Hitler in conversation on the Obersalzberg, and whether he thereby influenced the latter's foreign-policy future plans. What is certain is that for the dictator England had long since become a potential opponent in war. Hitler had recognized that London would under no circumstances be

prepared to give way to his constant pressing for a free hand for the “grasp toward the East,” and therefore in autumn 1937 undertook an aggressive change of course in his originally planned alliance strategy.

In Hitler’s view, the “Axis Berlin–Rome” was suitable as a means of pressure to move Great Britain toward an alliance. Blomberg regarded this Italy policy with complete incomprehension. In spring 1937 Mussolini had invited the General Field Marshal to a state visit to Italy in order to demonstrate to him the land, sea, and air forces. Blomberg followed this invitation only on 2 June after his visit to England, which was already taken as an affront in Italy. If one follows Blomberg’s description of his trip to Italy and the notes of the German ambassador in Rome, Ulrich von Hassell, then the entire Italy visit of the War Minister, which included not only an audience with the King but also a conference with Foreign Minister Count Ciano, stood under this unfavorable sign. Blomberg’s aversion to the journey, to the “Duce,” to the Italian way of life, to the treatment by the Italians — according to Hassell, several faux pas occurred here to which Blomberg reacted extremely sensitively — to Italy, and to an alliance with this country is not hidden in his notes. He writes: “The Duce had given up his shoulder-slapping attitude toward Germany. Since the Abyssinian War, when the League of Nations had imposed sanctions against him, the Italian leader had hoped for an alliance with Germany. During my visit this appeared in that Mussolini had believed that I intended to propose a treaty with Hitler. The reception and pomp of the entire affair certainly aimed at this expectation.” A witness of the visit reports: “When Mussolini received the Field Marshal at the Ala Littoria airfield, surrounded by numerous officers of all parts of the Wehrmacht, he was very taken with Blomberg’s fine appearance and amiable bearing; the visit at first proceeded harmoniously.”

Blomberg summarized his impressions of the Italian Wehrmacht to the effect that training, armament, and equipment of the army still left something to be desired, while he was very satisfied with the demonstrations of the navy and air force. “The army,” he writes, “had in extravagant fashion propagated an imminent European war. Its self-confidence stood out of proportion to reality. The slogan of ‘Blitzkrieg’ kept coming up. From it one promised oneself miracles. On me it had the effect of a frivolous phrase.” Blomberg’s judgment on the combat power of the Italian Wehrmacht remained authoritative for its assessment in National Socialist Germany. To Hitler the General Field Marshal had expressed that he considered it unwise to enter into a military alliance with Italy; he advised him against it. In his memoirs he writes: “It did not fall to me to make any decisions about military pacts, but I could not shake off the impression that the lifespan of fascism was bound to Mussolini’s lifetime. Hitler agreed with my views in this matter. His real opinion and his intentions emerged only at a later point in time.” Here Blomberg alludes to the “brake-shoe theory” he developed during the war, according to which Hitler “overthrew” him in January 1938 because he had been too cautious as his military adviser. In the years of the war and in the interrogations by the Allies, Blomberg would stiffen upon this “brake-shoe theory” and in doing so would heighten himself into a true psychosis of mistrust, of which more will be said.

When Mussolini came to Germany in September 1937, 20 to 25 September, in order to take part in the great Wehrmacht maneuver of the three parts of the Wehrmacht in Mecklenburg and in the following parade in Berlin, Blomberg had to determine that the “Duce” had not failed to learn of the German War Minister’s rejecting attitude toward a German-Italian alliance. The information channels had worked well, and someone from Hitler’s entourage had passed Blomberg’s attitude on to Mussolini, so that the latter, as Blomberg thought, completely ignored him during the discussions before and after his great speech on the Berlin Maifeld on 28 September. Blomberg had not been able to weaken Hitler’s illusions about Italy’s alliance value, for the dictator no longer needed him as military adviser, as would soon become apparent in all clarity.

THE HOSSBACH MEMORANDUM (1937)

On 5 November 1937, at the request of the Reich War Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht, Adolf Hitler summoned the highest military leaders to the Reich Chancellery: the commanders-in-chief of the army, Werner Freiherr von Fritsch; the Kriegsmarine, Erich Raeder; and the Luftwaffe, Hermann Göring; in addition, Reich Foreign Minister Konstantin Freiherr von Neurath. The occasion for this meeting was one of the violent quarrels among the heads of the Wehrmacht over the distribution of raw materials to army, navy, and Luftwaffe. In this matter Raeder had already given Blomberg an ultimatum, which demanded a doubling of the steel quota allocated to the navy and otherwise threatened an armaments stop. The military men were united only in their opposition to Göring, who, to the War Minister's great annoyance, had for some time exploited his position as head of the Four-Year Plan authority with unrestrained departmental egoism. Hitler was supposed to settle the competence and departmental struggles and point a way out of the dramatic supply situation, which in no case permitted the conduct of a war. In fact, not a word was said about all these problems in the conference — or rather in Hitler's four-hour monologue. Rather, he used the discussion of 5 November 1937 for a comprehensive exposition of his view of Germany's foreign- and military-political situation.

This discussion is transmitted in the so-called "Hossbach records." What is meant are the note-form jottings of Hitler's Wehrmacht adjutant, which he made during the session in question and later formulated into a memorandum from memory. The notes by Hossbach, which emerged after the war from the flood of documents and which allegedly reproduce the precise course of this discussion, have entered history as a "plea" for Hitler's Lebensraum policy in the East and thus as an important key and evidentiary document for Hitler's intention and decision to plunge the world into the abyss of war. Hossbach describes the attitude of the generals during the conference as "a smooth rejection of Hitler's plans." In his memoirs it says: "The discussion at times took very sharp forms, above all in a confrontation between Blomberg and Fritsch on the one hand and Göring on the other, in which Hitler participated mainly as an attentive listener. It has remained precisely in my memory that the sharpness of the oppositions, in substance and in form, did not fail to make an impression on Hitler. And he knew well enough that the two generals opposed every warlike entanglement provoked by our side."

The reception of the Hossbach records is of decisive importance for locating Blomberg in the historical image of the Federal Republic. From this description of the discussion transmitted by the Hossbach Protocol there arose the thesis that, in the conference of 5 November 1937, Hitler recognized that his closest military advisers stood in his way as critics of his Lebensraum philosophy and as brakes on his war course, and therefore three months later, by means of an intrigue, summarily "shipped them off." At times there is even talk of a veritable "war opposition" by Blomberg and Fritsch.

With regard to Blomberg, what matters less is the real or supposed significance and authenticity of the fragments transmitted by Hossbach of Hitler's thoughts about his political worldview and war plans, than rather the examination of whether the fact directly connected with it by numerous historians is correct: that the dismissal, carried out only a few weeks later, on 4 February 1938, of three of the five participants — namely Neurath, Fritsch, and Blomberg — had already been secretly decided by Hitler on this "black Friday."

If one considers the foreign-policy “cautiousness” which Blomberg, according to his own statement, had displayed in the period before 5 November, the suspicion suggests itself that he had become troublesome to Hitler as an adviser, and that Hitler wanted to remove him as a “brake shoe” on his course. In fact, as already described, since the reintroduction of universal military service there had increasingly been differences between the hesitant Blomberg and Hitler. The left-oriented exile and foreign press, in keeping with its overestimation of the army as a power factor in the Third Reich, hoped in Blomberg as a guarantor of a prudent German foreign policy.

And yet: Blomberg was certainly not an “antiwar War Minister.” Despite the differences shown between him and Hitler in questions of foreign policy, the latter will hardly have resolved on that historic 5 November 1937 to dismiss the War Minister because of his “foreign-policy caution.”

At this point it should be recalled once more that the armed power had already since the mid-1920s anticipated and planned a war of revenge. As has been described in detail, Blomberg, in accordance with his soldierly credo of regarding “war as the measure of all things,” had a decisive share in this. Blomberg’s military philosophy, his course in the Weimar Republic, the expansive rearmament that as Wehrmacht Minister from 1933 onward he had ultimately set going at the expense of all international relations, the ideologization of the Wehrmacht through a radical break with tradition, and the support of Hitler’s aggressive armaments policy from the first day of National Socialist rule onward all served this great distant goal.

The core of Hitler’s statements — that Germany had to conquer agriculturally usable Lebensraum in Europe by force of arms — had not been known to Blomberg and the other generals only since November 1937. After all, already in the mid-1920s, in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler had made the Pan-German and later German-national dream goal — Lebensraum in Russia and in the border states subject to it — into a foreign-policy maxim.

In 1938 the general officer corps was also of one mind with Hitler that Austria had to be integrated into the German Reich and that, for military-geographical reasons, Czechoslovakia had to be annexed. Accordingly, Hitler’s martial intention to solve the “German space question” on this 5 November at most did not find undivided agreement for military-technical reasons. In his hubris Hitler had explained that he wanted to dispose of the immediate goals, Austria and Czechoslovakia, already in 1938. Apart from Göring, Hitler’s military advisers and the Reich Foreign Minister had decisively opposed this, since under these circumstances they reckoned with the entry into war of England and France too early for the German Reich. Fritsch and Blomberg had drawn their lesson from the course of the First World War and wanted to avoid another two-front war under all circumstances.

On 5 November 1937 there existed, therefore, as Klaus-Jürgen Müller formulates it, “no principled conflict over the ‘whether,’ but a dissent over the ‘how and when.’” There can be no question, by contrast, of a principled opposition to war on the part of Fritsch or Blomberg.

After his inglorious fall, Blomberg repeatedly searched for reasons why Hitler had dropped him in 1938. Although, in the light of the development of the Second World War, understandably, he did not do this free from exculpation and self-stylization, it had not even occurred to him that his “opposition to war” could have been a reason for the dismissal. In his eyes, rather, it was his warnings about the military dangers posed by England and France that Hitler had misinterpreted as inappropriate timidity. In doing so Blomberg confined himself to his experiences with the French and British soldiers in the First World War and to the reports of the military attachés. After all, it corresponded to his duty as

military adviser to point out dangers. Even his former superior Hans von Seeckt had, in 1933, in his book *Germany between West and East*, warned urgently against waging a war on two sides and had endeavored to make clear the necessity of friendship with Soviet Russia. The thoughts of his former “antipode” Seeckt were all too familiar to the Sovietophile Blomberg, and Hitler’s foreign policy therefore filled him with great concern — not least in memory of the First World War. The danger of a recurrence of the situation of 1914 was the collective nightmare of German military men, insofar as they had passed through the school of the German General Staff.

With regard to Russia, Blomberg still wrote in 1945: “I myself had always been pro-Soviet Russia. This arose from our rape by V.V. [Versailles Treaty, the author notes], became more concrete through our cooperation in Russia, through our schools, and took firm shape through my two-month visit in Russia. [...] I did not pose to myself the political question of agreement with or rejection of Bolshevism, but regarded Russia as a world-political power factor. To undertake a military struggle against this has never appeared to me otherwise than to this day as madness. I always represented this opinion to Hitler and to others.”

In his notes of 1945 Blomberg further writes: “During my time as War Minister, the Führer often spoke with me about foreign policy. I would have gone the Führer’s path to Austria too, but then I would have set myself a period of ten years in order to build up the new Greater Germany and total armament. For it seemed unavoidable that Germany would once again have to fight for its strengthening.”

Already here there is proof that Blomberg, in the expectation of the unavoidable armed confrontation with the powers that would not accept Germany’s growing strength, agreed with Hitler, but accepted with only a shrug and incomprehension, or blocked out, Hitler’s ideological delusion, his mission of annihilating the “Jewish-Bolshevik Soviet Union.” As military adviser he limited himself to warning against underestimating the feared enemy potential. Blomberg also saw in his cautiousness a possible accusation by Hitler that was unfounded, for — so his argument in Hitler’s sense — “what better combination could there be than a stormy Führer and a cautious adviser, of whom one knew that, after a decision had been made, despite previous misgivings, he would go through thick and thin with him.”

During his imprisonment the general played down the significance of Hitler’s statements during the Hossbach conference. On 6 November 1945 he justified himself by saying that he had been “interrogated twice for the protocol” “about Hitler’s political view of Europe and his plans, or should one better call them fantasies. I had completely forgotten the event, because even then it seemed unreal and the reality of the day completely filled me.” He added: “Hitler’s broadly laid-out explanations on 7 November 1937 showed the then intentions of his leadership, as they had gradually formed. Even then they appeared to us as an airy construct, for whose becoming deed much, above all time, would still be necessary.”

In fact Blomberg had already transformed Hitler’s “fantasies” into the “reality of the day” and, with the Directives for the Unified Preparation for War of the Wehrmacht of 24 June 1937 — the so-called “Case Green” for a deployment against Czechoslovakia — into a tangible order. The assignment to work out the new directive had at that time been transferred to Jodl.

In the directive it says: “The general political situation justifies the assumption that Germany need not reckon with an attack from any side. In favor of this speak primarily, besides the lack of will for war among almost all peoples, especially among the Western powers, also the lack of readiness for war of a number of states, above all Russia. Just as little does there exist on Germany’s side the intention to unleash a European war. Nevertheless, the politically unstable world situation, which does not exclude

surprising incidents, requires constant readiness for war on the part of the German Wehrmacht.” As “probable war cases,” a two-front war with Schwerpunkt southeast, so-called deployment “Green,” was taken as the assumption. “In order to ward off such an impending attack by a superior enemy coalition,” “the war in the East could begin with a surprise German operation against Czechoslovakia.” After listing the preparations to be made by the Wehrmacht, the conclusion followed: “The final goal consists in a strategic assault on Czechoslovakia, prepared according to plan in peacetime, which brings down its fortifications by surprise, catches and smashes its armed forces still during mobilization, and, by exploiting the völkisch fragmentation, brings Czechoslovakia to collapse in a short time.”

The directive, which was supplemented by an addendum dated 7 December 1937, or, in the annex, 21 December 1937, was Blomberg’s last great war-directing act and clearly reproduced the extract of Hitler’s thoughts of 5 November 1937, thereby at the same time unreservedly confirming the War Minister’s agreement with Hitler’s ideas. In the “addendum” to the directive, which amounted to a revision of the deployment plans for a two-front war, it said unmistakably, with explicit reference to the guidelines laid down by Hitler on 5 November 1937: “Once Germany has reached her full readiness for war in all fields, the military precondition will have been created to bring an aggressive war against Czechoslovakia, and thus the solution of the German space problem, to a victorious end even if one or another great power intervenes against us. But if a situation arises which, through England’s aversion to a general European war, through its lack of interest in the Central European problem, and through a conflict breaking out between Italy and France in the Mediterranean, creates the probability that Germany will find no further opponent beside Czechoslovakia except Russia, then Case ‘Green’ will occur even before full readiness for war has been reached.”

These words show that Blomberg was certainly no opponent of war, and that he, like — *cum grano salis* — the rest of the general officer corps, was ultimately always ready to recognize and implement Hitler’s plans. Incidentally, the War Minister, in complete agreement with the Reichswehr leadership, had not greatly valued the striving for peace and understanding among peoples, and had often enough expressed this unmistakably. Thus in 1933/34 he condemned the “decomposing poison of pacifism”: “Pacifism of the masses of the people can be a form of illness, a symptom of disease. Pacifism of leadership is treason against the future of the people.” Immediately before the murder action of 30 June 1934 ordered by Hitler and carried out with the cooperation of the Reichswehr, he had triumphantly stated: “Pacifism is overcome. Wehrmacht and state have become one.”

Blomberg’s notes prove that on his part there were at no time serious differences and a pacifist attitude toward Hitler’s views. Blomberg did agree fundamentally with Hitler’s thoughts, but as a “responsible adviser” confined himself to warning against underestimating the feared enemy potential. After the outbreak of war in 1939, he saw his fears confirmed with regard to the overpowering enemy constellation. That then brought “some change in his view.” That Blomberg’s explanations after the collapse did not prevent the thesis of his opposition to Hitler’s warlike plans from being put forward is certainly also understandable from the fact that his estate, which contains some contradictory statements on this point, had not previously been analyzed in detail.

In 1975 the following view is found: Blomberg and Fritsch “were not Nazis. Hitler was clear, however, that this situation was not without danger. So long as the Wehrmacht was unpolitical and its Commander-in-Chief was not a National Socialist, the situation remained dangerous for the Nazis. How could Blomberg be removed? A dismissal was impossible.” It is difficult to understand that the author did not perceive the reports about Blomberg’s — and Fritsch’s — flaming profession of faith in Hitler, and also did not appropriately assess the “differences of opinion” between Wehrmacht leadership and Party leadership. Likewise the question arises why a dismissal should have been

“impossible.” The real reason for Blomberg’s dismissal was neither his opposition to war nor his cautiousness, but a completely different one — and Blomberg knew it only too well.

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BEFORE SUNSET:
THE SECOND MARRIAGE (1938)

At the beginning of 1938 Werner von Blomberg was at the height of his power. His career, which in Geneva in 1932 had seemed to be at an end, had taken a turn and, after Hitler’s “seizure of power,” had run upward in a steep curve. It reached its high point when Hitler, on his birthday, 20 April 1936, presented Blomberg with the marshal’s baton, thereby giving him the honor of being the first officer of the new Wehrmacht to bear its highest military rank. On the occasion of his fortieth anniversary of service, the man who, in protocol terms, was the first man in the state after Hitler was appointed on 13 March 1937 chief of Lower Saxon Infantry Regiment No. 73, Prince Albrecht of Hanover, in which he had served as a young officer before and during the First World War, and was honored with the Golden Party Badge.

Blomberg’s once so modest soldier’s life had changed in a fundamental way since 1933. The privations of the twenties had receded into the far distance, and Blomberg enjoyed to the full the luxury offered him in the circle of the “brown rulers in tailcoats,” as the exile organ *Pariser Tageblatt* mockingly called the Nazi elite.

Goebbels’s diary gives insight into nights celebrated together with Blomberg. Concerning the birthday celebration of his wife Magda on 11 November 1935, he notes: “In the evening large gathering. Führer and Blomberg there. We do cabaret. (...) It becomes very nice. The Führer is in very good spirits. And everyone remains until six o’clock in the morning. Hörbiger and the Ullrich sing to the accordion. A wild affair.” And Blomberg’s adjutant Boehm-Tettelbach describes the “social winter season” in the War Ministry: “Adjoining Blomberg’s service rooms on the first floor of the ministry [on the Tirpitzufer, today Reichpietschufer] were the reception rooms and the minister’s private apartment. This could be reached through an inconspicuous entrance from the projecting main portal. Blomberg’s household was at first managed by his second-eldest daughter Sybille and later by his youngest daughter Dorle. Both ladies, however, did not appear when people were invited to the regular gentlemen’s dinners of the Wehrmacht, at which up to twenty-four people could be seated. (...) The excellent wines and the select dishes were supplied alternately by the Hotel Bristol or by Horcher and served by their personnel. (...) Soon invitations to ‘only’ soldiers fell out of practice. Where people spoke exclusively about service, a relaxed mood could not so easily arise. As soon as Party people, government, or even artists were among the guests, it was hard to bring things to an end. (...) The film star Jenny Jugo and the singer Erna Berger contributed to the atmosphere, as did the actors Carl Ludwig Diehl, Willy Birgel, and Victor de Kowa with their colleagues Käthe Gold and Luise Ullrich. (...) Among the brilliant appearances on these occasions were also Kammersänger Marcel Wittrich, the singer Helge Roswaenge, and the opera singer Maria Cebotari von Wyroboff. (...) That the foreign military attachés were invited was a matter of course, especially since the latest news in the military field was presented to them in carefully measured doses. (...) Among the foreign ambassadors too,

Blomberg was a welcome guest because of his cosmopolitan manner. He took special pleasure in an invitation from the witty French ambassador André François-Poncet, who knew how much the Field Marshal valued the red wine of the western neighbor. Accordingly choice was the wine that the minister was served.”

Despite the colorful world in which the General Field Marshal moved, he loved retreat into his “inner citadel,” into the world of books, of lonely morning rides through the Berlin Tiergarten not far from the Reich Chancellery. These were moments of reflection and silence — a world of work and introversion which, behind the bustle of the day, was ruled by the loneliness into which he now fell more and more. It will not have been accidental that his horse was called “Misanthrope.”

At the beginning of 1938 Blomberg was in his sixtieth year, had been a widower for eight years, and was a twofold grandfather. To be sure, the image of the white-haired “widower-field commander,” whose life belonged wholly to the army and to his “Führer,” fit perfectly with the public image of the War Minister in the Hitler state; he himself, however, felt himself emotionally and physically in a critical life situation. In his notes of the year 1943 he expresses himself, in one of the few written excursions into his inner life, on his condition at that time — that “midlife crisis” — as follows: “With the death of my first wife began the crumbling of the structure of life. I was shaken by bitter torments of loneliness. The questions of life, death, and eternity stood closer before me and never again moved farther away. I felt that I had crossed the summit of life. One approached old age — almost as if from one day to the next — not so much through bodily decay and intellectual dulling as through the natural process of the growing-up of youth and through the melting-away of the feeling of expectation.”

“The growing-up of youth,” the becoming independent of the five children, who one after another went their own ways and founded families, made the widower increasingly lonely. Until 1936 Blomberg’s second-eldest daughter Sybille had functioned as “lady of the house” and accompanied her father on official occasions. She fell in love with the Swiss Franz Riedweg, married him in 1938, and left her father’s house. The youngest daughter Dorothee too opened to her father in autumn 1937 that she also wanted to leave his house in order to marry Wilhelm Keitel’s son Karl-Heinz.

The departure of the two daughters hit Blomberg deeply. This had not remained hidden from the Luftwaffe adjutant Boehm-Tettelbach either, who through his friendship with Blomberg’s son Axel also came close to his superior privately. “Boehmchen” began to make his own reflections about the minister’s future. At a reception of the Italian ambassador Bernardo Attolico, it struck him how enthusiastic Blomberg was about the host’s wife. The adjutant wrote in his memoirs that he had wished “that a similarly elegant woman, who equally united spirit and beauty, chic and charm, might also be found for the minister.”

Blomberg evidently thought similarly and around 1937 had begun to have himself treated by a magnetopath — a kind of “spiritual healer” — and emphasized how much good this “rejuvenation cure” did him. If one follows the reports of his circle, the still good-looking “very tall white-haired general with an almost unbelievably youthful face” also undertook, in this time of “rejuvenation,” occasional excursions into Berlin nightlife. Keitel, as his closest collaborator in the Wehrmacht Ministry, noticed that during this time Blomberg more often drove alone and in civilian clothes by car into the Thuringian Forest. When he asked Blomberg’s adjutant Georg von der Decken whether he knew the reason for Blomberg’s mysterious stays in Oberhof, Decken merely shrugged his shoulders and answered that he knew only that “Blomberg was visiting a lady there who had broken her ankle while skiing.” Keitel notes portentously that at the time he had “thought his part, without saying anything to anyone.”

Here probably lay the beginnings of the fateful affair of the War Minister with the attractive twenty-six-year-old Berliner Luise Margarethe Gruhn — 1.75 meters tall, slim, green eyes, blond bob — whom he married on 12 January 1938. The identity of the bride is still vividly speculated about today. Where did she come from, she who was to determine Blomberg's fate in such a grave way?

Luise Margarethe Gruhn was born on 22 January 1913 in Berlin-Neukölln. She grew up as an only child in modest circumstances. Her father, Paul Emil Gruhn, an innkeeper, died in October 1915 in a Belarusian military hospital. Margarethe's mother, Auguste Luise Gruhn, née Braun, had worked before the revolution in the Berlin City Palace. After the war she built up a new existence as a state-certified masseuse with a practice in Berlin-Neukölln. She evidently had little time to concern herself with her daughter, or the daughter had little interest in maternal care. Frau Gruhn, known in the neighborhood as a quarrelsome person, as a file from 1938 confirms, increasingly had difficulties with the upbringing of the daughter, who seemed to be pressing out of the petty-bourgeois narrowness of the shared apartment.

On the basis of a police search, the corresponding protocol in January 1932 says that "rapid intervention to prevent further neglect" was called for. At the end of 1931 Margarethe Gruhn was registered at Wilhelmstraße 124, in the police view "a flophouse," where she lived together with the Czech Jew Heinrich Löwinger. The unemployed engineer from Pressburg, married and father of a thirteen-year-old child, was overflowing with unsuccessful business ideas. After he had had only moderate success with the sale of a self-manufactured "rheumatic remedy," he hit on the idea of producing and distributing "obscene pictures." He asked Margarethe, who meanwhile had taken the artist's name Eva, to take part in a photo production in which Löwinger himself wanted to act as the male protagonist. The pornographic photographs which were indirectly to influence German history in so fatal a way were taken by an acquaintance of Löwinger, the unemployed photographer Ernst Mickler. Altogether six photographs were produced — five of them show the photo models unclothed in various sexual positions, the sixth shows Margarethe Gruhn alone.

Whether Löwinger had more success selling the photos than with his rheumatic remedy cannot be reconstructed, since already at the beginning of January 1932 an investigation had been opened against the couple for "dissemination of grossly obscene photographs." In the police interrogation on 23 January 1932 the later Frau von Blomberg stated somewhat naïvely that Löwinger had promised her a share of the profits but had intended to distribute the photographs "not in Berlin, but in Hamburg, Leipzig, Dresden," which was why she had agreed to participate. The result of the proceeding is not known; presumably the couple received a small fine. In 1934 Margarethe again appeared in the files. At the General Prosecutor's Office of the Berlin Regional Court there was an investigation against her, which was, however, discontinued. She was accused of having stolen a watch from a dentist. During the police interrogation, in which she was processed for identification purposes — that is, she was photographed and her fingerprints were taken — she gave her occupation as "stenotypist," but left blank the question in the form about her employer. A police note, however, recorded that she had a "yellow card," and therefore was a registered street prostitute.

When Blomberg came to know Margarethe Gruhn, she was therefore no "blank page." How much the War Minister knew about the previous life of his girlfriend must, however, remain unknown, since only he himself could have said anything about it. A letter from the wife of his former adjutant and long-time friend Friedeburg is illuminating in this connection. According to it, "Blomberg himself had no knowledge of the previous life of Marg. Gruhn. He knew only that she was from simple circumstances and thought he could bind her to himself only through a marriage. (...) Unfortunately my husband was then in the Mediterranean; otherwise he might perhaps have expressed himself more clearly to him, and

my husband would surely have been able to advise him against a marriage that so little suited so noble a man, so exacting in regard to propriety and behavior. The children told us later that Marg. Gruhn had tried to confess something of her past to her father, but he had rejected it.”

Blomberg had evidently, with the enthusiasm peculiar to him, fallen in love and, once again, was determined simply to block out a part of reality. Toward his family, and in his personal notes, he accordingly kept silent about the subject and writes that “Eva” was a long-standing “friend” whose occupation was “secretary.” General Field Marshal von Weichs, who in 1945 was lodged in one room with Blomberg in the Seckenheim prison camp, describes it in his memoirs as “characteristic” that Blomberg, although he told much about his relationship with Hitler, “did not lose a word” that the previous life “of his relationship was based on slander.”

In view of her significance for the development of German military history, it is understandable that even the circumstances under which Blomberg had come to know Margarethe Gruhn assumed a central place in the speculations about the affair. Within the Blomberg family there circulated the version that he had first seen Margarethe as a patient of her mother in the Neukölln practice. Frau Gruhn had specialized in severe bone fractures, so that there was quite the possibility that Blomberg, because of the broken leg that he had suffered in Vienna and that continued to trouble him for a long time, could have been in treatment there. Less flattering is the version according to which Blomberg came to know his “Eva” in the Berlin demi-monde or in a bar in Berlin-Halensee, which he is said to have visited in lonely hours.

Both variants of a first meeting appear little probable: neither would the War Minister have risked his reputation and position in Berlin nightclubs, nor would he have driven from his apartment in the Reichswehr Ministry on the Tirpitzufer all the way to Neukölln for the — entirely conceivable — treatment of the consequences of his automobile accident, in order then of all people to have himself treated by Frau Gruhn. And even if so: mother and daughter Gruhn were at odds at this time and Margarethe did not live in her mother’s house.

Another attempt to reconstruct the story is found in the memoirs of Blomberg’s favorite adjutant. According to this, it was “on a September morning of the year 1937” when the Field Marshal’s usual morning ride had to be canceled because his horse was lame. In order not to forgo his usual physical movement, Blomberg, according to Boehm-Tettelbach, decided instead to take a walk in the Tiergarten. “All later reconstructions speak for the fact that Blomberg on this day met the woman who became his fate.” The adjutant gives no reason why Margarethe Gruhn should have been in the Tiergarten on that September morning. Presumably he saw no need to explain what drove the young woman, who at that time lived in Eisenacher Straße in Schöneberg, early in the morning into the not exactly nearby Tiergarten. Blomberg’s horse trainer Walter Legde, who at that time rode out daily with the marshal, nevertheless supported the adjutant’s theory. He remembered, as he reported in an interview, that the Blomberg horses were at that time at a training course outside Berlin and that the Field Marshal therefore moved about on foot in the mornings. A short time later Blomberg himself came to Legde in the stable, full of pride, with Fräulein Gruhn, in order to introduce to him his future bride.

In mid-December 1937 General Ludendorff died. The pompous state burial for the First Quartermaster General of the Army General Staff in the First World War took place on 22 December 1937 in Munich. It was to be the last ritual staging of the National Socialist state in which Blomberg took part. He did not arrive with his saloon car, which Hitler had given him for service trips, with the special train from Berlin, but had himself collected by his adjutants from the snow-covered Golf Hotel in Oberhof. A simple oak coffin before the Munich Siegestor, flanked by high black pylons, crowned by bowls in

which the death-fire burned, formed the backdrop before which Blomberg delivered his last public speech for Ludendorff. When the last bars of the “Good Comrade” had faded away and the salute of honor had been fired in the Hofgarten, Hitler went back with his entourage to the waiting motorcade. Blomberg used this moment as the occasion to inform him, as his next superior, of his intention to marry. For all officers there existed in the Wehrmacht the regulation that before a wedding the so-called “marriage consent” had to be obtained from the next superior. Although the General Field Marshal in this conversation spoke of “a certain past” of his bride, who was “a girl from the people,” Hitler gave him his blessing.

Blomberg spent the Christmas days not with his children in Berlin, but with his future bride in the Oberhof hotel. Adjutant Boehm-Tettelbach describes how, shortly after New Year, he was surprised by his superior’s marriage intentions: “When on 11 January, shortly before the end of duty, I was occupied with compiling the list of registered visitors, Blomberg came from his workroom to me in the anteroom: ‘My dear fellow, tomorrow at twelve o’clock I am getting married. Therefore arrange everything next door in the ceremonial hall for a civil wedding in a small circle. Only the Führer and Göring are coming as witnesses. No one else. See to it that we are not disturbed. I do not need you and the other gentlemen.’ I was rarely at a loss for the right words, but now I was as if frozen and managed only a military ‘Jawohl.’ (...) Only when the minister had left the anteroom again did it gradually become clear to me what was happening, and I first raised the alarm with my comrades. Wangenheim came rushing like a torpedo; only Riebel, who was not yet so familiar with the customs in the OKW, remained calm: ‘Why this disturbance, when I was just about to go home?’ We first sat down, fetched our ‘first aid,’ the schnapps, from its hiding place behind the Leitz folders in the steel cabinet, and drank one.”

After taking the “first aid,” the adjutants decided to seek out Blomberg’s daughter Dorothee. “Dorle” had “reacted completely perplexed — evidently knew nothing of the father’s plans. But Dorle put some things together. Her bedroom was located next to that of her father [which according to Dorothee Keitel’s statement in an interview in March 2002 did not correspond to the facts at that time]. From there she had occasionally heard him telephoning at unusual times; she had not become suspicious. From earlier she knew Hitler’s peculiar working hours and his nightly calls from the Reich Chancellery; they always came through the ministry switchboard. The new nightly calls, however, evidently came through a private special line which bypassed the switchboard and could only recently have been laid into Blomberg’s bedroom. (...) This information, completely new to us, triggered the most impossible speculations.” From Senior Intendancy Councillor Hartmann, who administered the financial affairs of the ministry and the adjutancy, Blomberg’s collaborators learned that their superior had ordered, some weeks earlier, the furnishing of an apartment near the Tirpitzufer. Hartmann knew nothing to report about the purpose the apartment was to serve — but he no longer needed to.

Blomberg was married on 12 January 1938 in the presence of Hitler and Göring, who acted as witnesses, in the great hall of the War Ministry. The couple dispensed with a pompous church wedding, as would actually have corresponded to Blomberg’s position. There were no celebrations — neither in large nor in small circle. Publication of the banns in the *Völkischer Beobachter* occurred on 13 January 1938 — but without naming the bride’s first name. After the wedding, the Berlin newspapers carried in an inconspicuous place only a short official notice, in which it was laconically communicated that the Reich War Minister had married “Fräulein Gruhn” on Wednesday, 12 January, and that the “Führer” and Reich Chancellor and Colonel General Göring had been witnesses. Goebbels on this in his diary: “Blomberg’s marriage discussed in the press, as desired, ‘small.’”

Immediately after the wedding, the newly married couple began their honeymoon to Oberhof. The

journey had to be interrupted early because of the death of Blomberg's mother, so that he and his wife were back in Berlin already on 24 January after the burial in Eberswalde, 20 January.

Despite all these peculiarities, which were taken note of by the surrounding world with the greatest astonishment, one would only congratulate a sixty-year-old widower if he found new happiness in life with a young woman; but the Reich War Minister, assuming he knew the truth about Margarethe's past, could not fall into the illusion that this would remain undiscovered. Even if he did not know the details of her previous life, he would have had to know that in no case was he permitted to disregard the strict marriage regulation of the Wehrmacht, in whose tightening, ironically, he himself had decisively participated just two years earlier. In one way or another, the monstrous significance of his marriage would have had to be clear to him.

In a commemorative article for the Prussia year 1981, Marion Gräfin Dönhoff reported on the ideas prevailing at that time in the officer corps: they had developed "that specific concept of honor which, in the hierarchical societies of the ancien régimes, was demanded of the upper stratum as compensation for its privileges. (...) Everyone who belonged to this guild knew that a very definite form of behavior was demanded of him. (...) Divorce was considered out of the question for officers and higher officials and entailed the loss of position and reputation."

In 1937/38 several embarrassing marriage affairs were already unforgotten among the German general officer corps, even though they had been handled with the greatest discretion and had had only internal consequences. Thus the predecessor of Schleicher and Blomberg as Reichswehr Minister, General Wilhelm Groener, a widower since 1926, surprisingly married in autumn 1930, at the age of sixty-two, his much younger housekeeper, who shortly afterward bore him a child. A few years later, the world-historical marriage scandal in the British royal house demonstrated the power of love setting itself above all differences of estate. On 10 December 1936 King Edward VIII had renounced the throne for the sake of the multiply divorced American Wallis Simpson. The fateful decision of the British king and its consequences made a lasting impression in Germany too at that time and surely had psychological effects in the conflict case of General Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg.

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THE BIRTH OF THE SCANDAL: THE "GRUHN FILE"

A few days after Blomberg's wedding, a photograph appeared in the German press showing the War Minister and his second wife during their honeymoon, on a visit to the Leipzig Zoo, in front of the monkey cage. Shortly afterward, rumors from police circles accumulated, saying that the marshal's wife in the newspaper photograph had been identified from various sides as a "lady of the demi-monde," and the Berlin prostitutes are said in those days to have celebrated a veritable jubilee over the fairy-tale story of the marshal and the whore.

A criminal commissioner picked up the rumors and took a look at Gruhn's police registration card, including photographs. Alongside the prescribed change of registration from Eisenacherstraße into her

husband's apartment on the Tirpitzufer, this contained a reference to the fatal file from 1932, including photographs, which stated that the "marshal's wife" had been registered by the morals police for pornography and various other offenses. After studying the files, he set off under the greatest secrecy with the highly explosive evidentiary material to Werner Best, administrative chief of the Security Police, who in turn immediately informed the Berlin Police President Wolf Heinrich Graf Helldorff.

On Friday, 21 January, at 4:15 p.m., Helldorff then appeared before Blomberg's chief of the Wehrmachtamt and closest collaborator, Keitel. Keitel was supposed to identify the woman in the photographs in order to exclude a case of mistaken identity, but he could not do so, since he had so far seen the wife of his superior only once, at the burial of Blomberg's mother, heavily veiled. Since Keitel could neither confirm nor exclude the identity, Helldorff demanded that Blomberg be sought out at once and made to take a position on the matter. He, however, was in Eberswalde in order to settle his mother's estate and could not be reached. Instead of keeping the piquant matter within the Wehrmacht, Keitel suggested to Helldorff that he go with the file to Göring, who, as Prussian Interior Minister, was Helldorff's superior. In addition, Göring, who as witness to the wedding had personally met the bride only recently, was excellently suited to identify her, which he then did that same afternoon.

One reason why Keitel after 1945 and during the Nuremberg trials was treated by other officers as an "outcast" is to be sought in the fact that he was perceived as "Judas" in the Blomberg affair. Among other things, he was accused of having, through lack of moral courage, unconditional loyalty to the Führer — "Lakeitel" — naïveté, or competitive thinking, allowed the affair to swell into a state scandal by playing the Gruhn dossier into Göring's hands and thus, as it were, delivering Blomberg "to the knife." General Warlimont thinks that Keitel cleverly exploited the opportunity of the Blomberg affair to get rid at last of his superior, "who had often enough stood in his way."

The author duo Janßen and Tobias, however, in their reassessment of the Wehrmacht affair of 1938, come to a different conclusion. In their view, Keitel's role in the Blomberg scandal was "largely marginal"; Keitel had not acted out of hunger for power and careerism, but rather had not wanted to discuss the embarrassing story with his son's future father-in-law — humanly understandable — and furthermore was still assuming that Blomberg knew nothing of his wife's previous life and, once the facts became known, would immediately separate from her. At that time Keitel could indeed not yet foresee what disaster for the army began to unfold with the reference to Göring; nevertheless he acted unquestionably indiscreetly and thoughtlessly.

On Sunday, 23 January, the entire Gruhn file was handed over to Göring. It was now up to him to bring Hitler the news of Blomberg's faux pas. When Hitler returned on Monday evening, 24 January, from an event in Munich, Göring was already waiting for him in the foyer of the Reich Chancellery. Faced with the pornographic photographs, the dictator received "the shock of his life." "Three neuralgic points at once were touched," according to Janßen and Tobias, in the prudish Austrian civil servant's son: first, a grossly obscene act; second, one carried out with a member of the Czech people despised by him; and third, one who was also of Jewish confession, which for Hitler was equivalent to "racial defilement."

Goebbels, who since 1933 had often met privately with Blomberg, reports about the War Minister in his diary in typically cynical-arrogant fashion. On 17 January 1938 he had given a presentation in the War Ministry before the divisional commanders, for which he — naturally — "finds great applause." "Afterward conversation with Blomberg. He is very happy in his young marriage. Unfortunately his ninety-year-old mother is deathly ill. He is very sad about it." Still Goebbels finds: "Blomberg is a fine fellow."

Only a short week had passed, and there was thunderstorm mood: “Noon with the Führer. Tense mood. Unpleasant situation around Blomberg. Not yet clarified.” Goebbels did not yet know that Blomberg’s situation had become not merely “unpleasant,” but catastrophic, and not only for him. Already the following day he learned more: “Discussed the Blomberg case with Wiedemann [Fritz Wiedemann was Hitler’s personal adjutant, the author notes]. Then Helldorff also joins in. Blomberg cannot be saved at all. His wife previously convicted because of obscene photos of herself, under control until 1937; the photos are mean and disgusting. Blomberg must take his leave.” He added: “Only the pistol remains for a man of honor. But, but. (...) The Führer as witness to the wedding. It is unimaginable.”

Blomberg describes in his notes and in an interrogation in 1945 what then happened on the morning of 26 or 27 January: “Göring paid me a surprising visit. He informed me that certain things concerning my wife had resurfaced and — although they lay far in the past — would unavoidably entail serious consequences for me. I would have to be relieved of my position and immediately discharged from the army. I would have to leave Germany for one year. My wife could be divorced immediately. All this he told me in about five minutes! It was the greatest surprise of my life and the worst blow that had ever struck me. I was outraged over such unjust treatment, which was being meted out to me with such persecution without even the shadow of a warning. Furthermore, I insisted that I surely might claim a little bit of freedom in the choice of my wife. Thereupon I received the cool answer that with regard to my marriage I could proceed as I pleased, but that the dismissal was absolutely final.”

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THE FRITSCH CASE

Against the background of the Blomberg scandal, Hitler allowed an old suspicion against Colonel General von Fritsch, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, to be revived. In the summer of 1936 the Reichsführer SS and Chief of the German Police, Heinrich Himmler, had presented him with a police file in which Fritsch was suspected of having engaged in homosexual activity around 1933/34 and of having been blackmailed because of it. The diplomatic crisis after the march into the demilitarized Rhineland and personal reasons had moved Hitler to pass over the accusations against Fritsch; and although, as Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht, he thereby made himself liable to punishment, he had ordered the destruction of the file concerning Fritsch. On the evening of 24 January 1938 he summoned Himmler to the Reich Chancellery and ordered him to reconstruct the investigation files immediately and to resume witness interrogations.

The accusation that Fritsch was a “175er” — that is, someone accused under Paragraph 175 — seemed in any case not entirely groundless: the Commander-in-Chief of the Army really was “a somewhat peculiar bachelor,” with an extremely deep attachment to his mother, was never seen in female company, and so forth. Whether Hitler only now had believed that Fritsch had ordered rent boys from a pimp years earlier, or whether the “Fritsch file” now seemed to him a welcome occasion to rid himself of the Colonel General, is not clear. What is certain is that his behavior was at least opaque. Hitler’s earlier openness toward Röhm, whose sexual preference had long been known before 1934; the fact that the homosexual Dr. Walter Funk became Reich Economics Minister precisely on 5 February 1938; Hitler’s indifference when the accusations against Fritsch had first been raised in 1934; his order to

destroy the evidentiary files — all this clearly shows that fundamentally it was all the same to him whether there were homosexuals among his followers or not.

In the following weeks Fritsch was repeatedly interrogated in a lengthy investigative proceeding, both by the Gestapo and by a military judge. The smoldering domestic-political power struggle between SS and Wehrmacht became fully visible in the Fritsch crisis: while the Gestapo investigators sought to prove the Colonel General's guilt in order thereby to deal the Wehrmacht a decisive blow, the military men advocated Fritsch's rehabilitation. While the investigations were still underway, on 3 February 1938, Fritsch was ordered, on Hitler's command, to request his discharge. Fritsch drew the consequences.

In the officer corps it was especially "the immoral, ethically offensive" nature of the procedure against Colonel General Fritsch that caused the deepest outrage. Jodl writes — after Canaris had informed him "in what unworthy manner the interrogation" of Fritsch by the Gestapo "had taken place" — in his diary on 26 February 1938: "If this becomes known in the troops, there will be revolution." Even though the "villainous trick" against Fritsch had deeply and lastingly shaken the relationship of trust of many officers toward Hitler, there was no "revolution," as Jodl had feared. To be sure, some generals wanted to submit their resignations in protest, but refrained from doing so at Colonel General von Brauchitsch's request. In the coming weeks, he said, there would inevitably be a war because of the Sudeten question, and in such circumstances one could not leave one's post. Fritsch shared Brauchitsch's view. Both were far removed from coup intentions. The homogeneity of the officer corps had long since been destroyed. In the army there were many National Socialist reserve, police, and so-called supplementary officers, as well as lieutenants who had emerged from the Hitler Youth. Support from naval officers, or even from officers of Göring's Luftwaffe, was not to be expected.

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THE PLOT

As unexpected and unwelcome as Blomberg's *mésalliance* was for Hitler, his faithful follower thereby gave him the chance to disempower the Wehrmacht completely from one day to the next. This simple version seemed to many so unbelievable that they preferred to it the myth of the plot against the generals, the myth of an SS intrigue against Blomberg tolerated by Hitler, which for a long time determined the view of the general. How widespread the topos of the plot is can be seen from the fact that in many handbooks this thesis is still presented today as historically certain. The most detailed analysis of the Blomberg-Fritsch crisis, which follows this interpretation and the thesis connected with it of Blomberg's "opposition to war," is offered by Harold C. Deutsch's book, published in 1974, *The Plot; or, The Disempowerment of the Generals*. Deutsch transmits the version that Hitler allegedly resented Blomberg, Fritsch, and Neurath for the resistance they had supposedly expressed openly on the historic 5 November 1937 against the dark war plans he had unexpectedly revealed, and that he immediately resolved in secret to get rid of these troublesome critics at the next opportunity that presented itself. He then allegedly brought about this opportunity himself at the beginning of 1938 through an "infamous intrigue," or had it "staged" by compliant satellites such as Göring, Himmler, and Heydrich. This mode of presentation anchored for decades in the historical image of the Federal

Republic the thesis that Hitler and Göring had staged a plot against Blomberg in order to appropriate his military power, because Blomberg had opposed Hitler's war course. In a television drama called *Geheime Reichssache*, *Secret Reich Matter*, 1988, the affair was correspondingly treated; and the writer Hans Hellmut Kirst, with the Blomberg material modeled in this way, which he had already processed into a novel, *General Affairs*, in 1977, achieved a world circulation of five million copies and 221 foreign editions in only two years. In his novel, in which the author, according to his own statement, "in very many details follows the documents and the reports of contemporaries," Kirst copies Harold C. Deutsch's *The Plot*, which for years was regarded as the standard work on the subject, almost word for word in numerous passages. He stylizes Blomberg and his second wife into noble and innocent victims of evil powers and pathetically dedicated his novel "to the victims" — Blomberg.

The myth of the plot already has its roots in the reception of the affair in the year 1938. A report in Heinrich Brüning's letters and notes proves what confusion the opaque morals affair caused among the political semi-insiders. The former Reich Chancellor had met Carl Goerdeler in Brussels in mid-March 1938, and Goerdeler had supplied him with the latest rumors about the scandal. The Field Marshal, according to Goerdeler, had installed "a former prostitute as secretary in the construction department of the War Ministry," where she was selling "tips" to construction firms and land speculators. Without Blomberg's knowledge she was also selling "information to foreign agents." "Himmler had her watched and was very well informed about her machinations. When she was interrogated by two prominent Gestapo officials, she became very afraid, went to Blomberg, and said that he had to marry her immediately in order to prevent an investigation. [...] She succeeded in impressing Blomberg with vague hints about a conspiracy directed against him." Finally, the frightened Blomberg allegedly asked Hitler and Göring to act as witnesses at the wedding. "As Goerdeler said, Hitler knew the whole story and agreed in order later to have grounds for outrage."

"Plotters, intriguers, and schemers" against Blomberg were identified, alternatively and with distributed roles, as Göring, Himmler, and Heydrich, as well as Hitler, who were said to have deliberately lured Blomberg into this marriage adventure ruinous for him. In fact, it was supposedly a "diabolical game of the Gestapo." Above all Hermann Göring is accused of being the real wire-puller of the alleged plot against Blomberg and Fritsch. As motives for these intrigues, Göring is accused of hunger for office — since he wanted to become Blomberg's successor — ambition, and envy. Göring himself declared on 20 October 1945, when he was interrogated in the presence of General William Donovan, the chief of the American intelligence service OSS, that Blomberg's resignation had had only to do with his wife.

Such accusations are questionable already because Göring certainly would not have dared, through such an extremely complicated "intrigue," and one made very dangerous by the unavoidable persons who would have known and helped, to shake Hitler's authority and plunge the Third Reich into a state crisis — the worst since 1934, as Goebbels accurately noted in his diary on 25 January 1938. If Hitler had wanted to get rid of his most loyal admirer in the Wehrmacht, he would merely have had to demand his resignation.

Werner von Blomberg was certainly not the pitiable victim of an "infamous intrigue" by Hitler, Göring, Himmler, and/or Heydrich. Proofs for this are Blomberg's efforts, intensified to an extreme degree, to keep the marriage and the personal details of the bride secret. To this belonged dispensing with the church wedding that was actually unavoidable, and with the ceremony corresponding to his position in the Third Reich. To this further belonged keeping his trusted collaborators away from the wedding ceremony, and limiting the press notice to the bare essentials. Finally, there belonged to this the immediate departure of the spouses without the smallest festivity and the dense veiling of the young wife at the burial of Blomberg's mother, whereby, again consistently, expressions of condolence were

forbidden in order to exclude any possible opportunities for discovery even on that occasion — he must have known something.

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THE SECOND CONDEMNATION (1938)

That Hitler himself had “staged” the Blomberg-Fritsch affair in order “politically to disempower the Wehrmacht and subject it to his Führer command” at first seemed plausible. After all, the Wehrmacht was the last state institution that had not yet been completely coordinated. It is true that Blomberg had “known no other goal since the year 1933 than to serve Hitler faithfully and to make the Wehrmacht into an instrument devoted to him. But Blomberg was obviously not willing to go along with Hitler’s war policy, and therefore he had to be removed.” In this, however, it is overlooked that it would have been much more elegant and inconspicuous for Hitler simply to replace the supposedly antiwar War Minister. Hitler had already separated himself from several ministers in this way: from Hugenberg, Papen, Eltz-Rübenach, and Kurt Schmitt. Added to this is the fact that since 1934 Hitler had been “Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht” and that the entire Wehrmacht was in any case subject to his command.

Numerous testimonies show how deeply Hitler was affected and disturbed by the catastrophic mésalliance of the General Field Marshal whom he valued, and by the uniquely scandalous circumstances. If one believes the statements of his entourage, the dictator was completely confused by the embarrassing events and close to a nervous breakdown. Goebbels too, by his own account, had his “hair standing on end”: “Helldorff brings me the file ‘Frau General Field Marshal Blomberg.’ This is simply dreadful! The calamity grows threateningly. I am completely finished. There is no way out anymore. Only the pistol can help now!” Elsewhere: “I am completely shattered. The Führer looks like a corpse. I feel most sorry for him.”

On 30 January 1938 the diary entry reads: “The Führer has me summoned to him. I am alone with him for two hours in his private room. He is somewhat more composed again, but still very pale, gray, and shaken. He tells me his whole sorrow. How all his human ideals have been shattered. Blomberg marries a whore and stays with her and lets the state go. The Führer believes that he knew all of it beforehand. [Blomberg] now falls for the first woman [sic] who comes along. He has directly ambushed the Führer with his marriage. The Führer trusted him blindly. That was a great mistake.”

Familiar with Hitler’s inclination toward theatrical emotional outbursts, his Luftwaffe adjutant Nikolaus von Below later confirmed the depression of his superior at that time: “Blomberg’s marriage had triggered a real shock in Hitler. [...] He lived completely withdrawn for the next two days. He conducted all conversations in his private rooms, which I had never experienced before. He also did not appear for meals. [...] Other gentlemen from Hitler’s entourage also shared my personal view that Hitler had never been so affected by anyone’s conduct as by Blomberg’s marriage. [...] Even Rudolf Hess’s flight to England in 1941 did not affect Hitler so much. With this affair a world collapsed for Hitler. Until this incident, [his] respect for generals and the nobility had been unshakable.”

In agreement with his comrades from Luftwaffe and navy, Hitler's army adjutant Gerhard Engel, relying on stenographic notes from the time, reports what Hitler told him privately while walking back and forth after the "commotion" around his birthday on 20 April 1938: namely, that "the necessary departure [of Blomberg and Fritsch] had deeply shaken him. After all, the War Minister's merit in the establishment of the National Socialist state had been historic and would remain so." Blomberg, he said, had been the "first National Socialist-thinking officer."

Hitler's ambivalent feelings in view of the Blomberg scandal resulted, on the one hand, from the fact that in Blomberg he lost a loyal collaborator and military specialist and now saw himself facing sole military responsibility; on the other hand, from fear of his demystification at home and abroad if the true reasons for Blomberg's dismissal — embarrassing for him, especially as witness to the wedding — became known. At this point he could not know that his fears would turn out to be unfounded.

The true background of the dismissal of Blomberg and Fritsch therefore could under no circumstances become known abroad. Goebbels reveals a propagandistic aspect of the personnel reshuffle when, three days before the event, he notes in his diary: "In order to obscure the whole matter, a great reshuffle is to take place." Under the date of 4 February 1938 this reshuffle was then carried out. Blomberg and the Chief of Army Command Fritsch, who was accused of homosexual offenses, were relieved of their positions "because of impaired health." Hitler himself took supreme command over the entire Wehrmacht.

The Wehrmachtamt in the Reich War Ministry was renamed the High Command of the Wehrmacht, which from then on had to function as Hitler's military staff under the Chief of the High Command of the Wehrmacht, OKW. Keitel, Blomberg's closest collaborator and "Judas" in the Blomberg affair, became Chief of the OKW. The OKW was not a unified command office for the entire Wehrmacht, and the commanders-in-chief of the three Wehrmacht branches retained extensive autonomy in command questions. Hitler appointed General of Artillery Walther von Brauchitsch, simultaneously promoted to colonel general, as Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Göring received the marshal's baton he had long desired. In addition, by April more than forty command posts were reshuffled. Fourteen generals suddenly found themselves placed into retirement.

At the same time as the Wehrmacht, Hitler also subordinated to himself on 4 February 1938 the second still relatively independent power factor in the state: the Foreign Office. The ambassadors in London, Rome, Tokyo, and Vienna — Ribbentrop, Hassell, Dirksen, and Papen — were recalled. Ribbentrop became successor to the previous Foreign Minister, Konstantin Freiherr von Neurath, who was likewise removed from his office. In the change of Foreign Minister the transition from compliant collaborators of Hitler to mere vassals was especially clear, for here the dictator had more thorough knowledge of persons than he had available to him for the military.

The internal power structure of the Third Reich had changed decisively with 4 February 1938. Those involved in the conspiracy of 20 July 1944 testified after their arrest by the Gestapo that, with the Blomberg-Fritsch crisis, the decisive switches had been set for them toward later resistance activity; and for some key figures of the later resistance, the Wehrmacht crisis of that year was in fact a decisive turning point in their attitude toward the regime, the decisive "incubation phase" for the national-conservative opposition that formed afterward. Thus Ludwig Beck's "Damascus," as Harold C. Deutsch formulates it, was the Fritsch crisis.

Many other officers too later invoked the Blomberg-Fritsch crisis as a disillusioning event that had shocked them at the time and opened their eyes to the true nature of the National Socialist regime. In

1938, however, none of them thought of a military putsch, as Beck's saying — "mutiny and revolution are words that do not exist in the officer's lexicon" — sufficiently proves. Nor did the Blomberg crisis offer the right occasion for a revolt of the officer corps against Hitler: a time of military-political triumph, as Germany celebrated it with Hitler in 1938, was completely unsuited for a generals' uprising. Not a single battalion would have marched — certainly not after the Anschluss of Austria, euphorically celebrated throughout the whole people.

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THE FINAL AUDIENCE WITH HITLER

That Hitler, after Blomberg's fall, assumed supreme command over the Wehrmacht was logical and in conformity with the system. Blomberg himself had proposed this solution to his "Führer" during his farewell audience in the Reich Chancellery and thereby showed him the way out of the difficult question of personnel reshuffling, something that has been described as a "stab in the back of the Wehrmacht."

Again and again Blomberg comes back in his memoirs to this last personal discussion with Hitler on 27 January 1938 and describes it in British captivity as follows: "Our meeting began with an extremely stormy scene, during which I gave free rein to my anger over the vile way in which they had rid themselves of me. Hitler at first replied sharply, but then the discussion became calmer (...)." The sequence must probably have been the reverse, for Blomberg's dismissal was the result of the discussion, as Keitel plausibly notes in his memoirs: "[Blomberg] was completely shaken and close to collapse. The long discussion ended with his dismissal."

Blomberg further reports: "He asked me whom I could propose as my successor. I told him that, according to seniority, Göring was next. Hitler rejected him outright. Göring was absolutely unsuitable to fill this position. He explained that Göring possessed neither the necessary ambition nor the required forcefulness to bear such responsibility." Then Blomberg reminded him "that he himself, according to our constitution, had always been Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht. If he decided to leave my position unfilled, he would be Supreme Commander both in fact and in law. Hitler replied that he would 'think about it.' At the very beginning he had said that Colonel General von Fritsch too had to go, without giving reasons. Now I was to suggest a successor. I named Reichenau and Brauchitsch. 'He would consider it.' (...) Then he said that, in the event he decided to take over my position, he would need a chef de bureau. I explained to him that Keitel, who had held a similar position under me, would be a suitable candidate. He was industrious, conscientious, and professionally capable. (...) suitable for a [position] of the second rank. Again the Führer promised to 'think about it.'"

What had calmed Blomberg was Hitler's promise that, "after a one-year stay abroad," he would draw him back to himself "as his closest adviser," "even if not in a military position," and that his "Führer" (...) had been very cordial to him at the end and had declared that, "if the hour should ever come when a war had to be fought, he would see him again at his side." Wilhelm Keitel, an attentive observer of the events, later had the impression that Blomberg had clung too strongly to Hitler's words and still saw a way out for himself. He added further that Blomberg "as Field Marshal, according to old-

Prussian tradition, would always remain in service and receive full salary, even if for the time being he was condemned to inactivity.”

When Blomberg — already in civilian clothes — left the Reich Chancellery on that 27 January 1938, the guards no longer saluted. Hossbach silently accompanied him to his car. Blomberg’s farewell words, “Farewell, my good man!” struck the colonel as mockery. The next day the former War Minister, if one follows Keitel’s memoirs, handed over to Keitel the key to the safe in his workroom and two large sealed envelopes. “One was the order concerning Hitler’s succession; the other a large memorandum on the command of the Wehrmacht,” which had been worked out after the Wehrmacht war game in autumn 1937. In addition, the two men also settled the financing of the marriage of their children. On the same day Blomberg and his wife left Berlin in great haste. For the time being, the couple was withdrawn from the curious glances of foreign reporters. The following day, 28 January 1938, Hitler spoke to Keitel of “his greatest reverence for Blomberg and his gratitude toward him; (...) he had given Blomberg a world trip and wished that he leave Germany for one year; Blomberg had accepted that.”

It is plausible that Hitler, torn back and forth between disappointment and relief over the circumstances and the new possibilities, wanted first to make Blomberg disappear from the political stage with the gift of a world trip. He had already practiced with success the deportation of dangerous contemporaries into exile several times. Thus the former OSAF-East Captain Walther Stennes had been released from prison in 1933 after a suicide attempt on the condition that he immediately depart for China in order to become chief of Chiang Kai-shek’s bodyguard. Allegedly an attempt had also been made to send the second federal leader of the Stahlhelm, Theodor Duesterberg, who had become “intolerable” because of his Jewish descent, on a world trip for one year and thus make him disappear from the political field of vision.

Even if Hitler’s promise to use Blomberg again later had been sincere, he would not have been able to keep it because of the “anti-Blomberg front” among the generals, which had existed latently for some time and had become increasingly obvious with the events of January 1938. This aversion to Blomberg was not attributable to his outsider role among the generals or to the Diadochi struggles between Army Command and Reichswehr leadership. What weighed heavily was his violation of the honor code of the military elite, by which he had exposed himself and the Wehrmacht to ridicule. In this connection an episode is revealing which the military attaché Faber du Faur experienced during a dinner in honor of the Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović at the end of January 1938. He writes: “I came in together with Fritsch, whom Neurath greeted with the words: ‘Have you perhaps also married?’ Tableau! The Blomberg affair seemed already to have made us a laughingstock in full public view. For the first time I was ashamed to wear this tunic.”

The outrage and contempt that Blomberg’s violation of the iron moral laws of his caste triggered, as well as the mood that prevailed at the time, became clear in Beck’s words: “One cannot tolerate that the highest soldier marries a whore; he must be forced to separate from the woman, or he must be erased from the list of officers and as holder of a regiment. The commanding generals must convey this standpoint of the army to the Führer.”

The degree of hostility of the conservative officers against Blomberg is also shown by the conduct of Blomberg’s former naval adjutant, Hubert von Wangenheim. Without orders, but with the knowledge of the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, Erich Raeder, he followed the former War Minister shortly after his departure from Berlin to Rome, the first stage of Blomberg’s world trip. He wanted once more to enlighten his former superior about his wife’s past and call upon him to draw the consequences and

divorce her again. The stormy adjutant reached Blomberg in his Roman hotel before his departure for Naples. When Blomberg firmly rejected Wangenheim's demand, the latter reproached him with having soiled not only his own honor but also that of the officer corps, and called him a "traitor and deserter whose picture would now be torn from all barracks walls." Then, significantly, he laid a pistol on the table before Blomberg and disappeared.

Blomberg complained to the War Ministry about Wangenheim's presumptuous demand. He had refused it, since "he obviously moved on a different plane of life and conceptions than he did." Not only did Blomberg in his honeymoon truly seem to move on another "plane of life"; Hitler too, which Wangenheim did not know, had obtained from his first marshal, during the farewell audience, the promise not to take his own life, for reasons of state. With his journey to Italy, Wangenheim had endangered the carefully considered arrangement between Hitler and Blomberg and had shortsightedly risked a further worldwide scandal. For this reason the adjutant was then also relieved of his post in the Reich War Ministry.

Hitler underestimated, or was kept ignorant of, the true extent of the animosities that were fermenting in the Wehrmacht against Blomberg. Goebbels's diary notes prove the same aversion toward Blomberg also in the circle of Hitler's paladins, or "capitanos," as Blomberg himself liked to call them. Blomberg was henceforth regarded as the "corruptor of the Wehrmacht," as a "dark spot on the honor of the German army." The breaking of the taboo — generally a phenomenon that encourages one-sided and unreflective views of human beings — led Blomberg into social isolation. For this reason too, the *damnatio memoriae* in the ancient tradition, which Hitler imposed upon Blomberg, was a sweeping success.

Hitler, under pressure from his entourage as well, had decided on the tactic of condemnation and agreed that Blomberg should be removed from the officers' rank list. Gerd von Rundstedt's request, arising from the "standpoint of the army," to have Blomberg placed before a court of honor was, however, rejected by him, since he had to fear that such a procedure would unavoidably spread the scandal in the public sphere at home and abroad and cause a corresponding loss of authority.

Another measure, which was restricted to the cosmos of the Wehrmacht but was all the more effective and symbolically charged within it: from 1938 onward the former Reich War Minister and retired General Field Marshal no longer appeared in any of the annually continued service rank lists of the Army Personnel Office. The public hero cult around the War Minister also came to an abrupt end in 1938: devotional objects such as pictures, busts, even toy figures were destroyed; an officious Blomberg biography commissioned by Hitler was no longer completed. The toy firm Hausser had sold a series of four toy soldiers modeled on a Blomberg portrait. After the former War Minister had to withdraw from public life, the figures continued to be sold as "unspecific soldiers." From documents of the Hausser archive it could be established that another Blomberg figure, with horse, had been planned. The project did not get beyond the prototype of the figure of 1937. Blomberg's banishment from public memory reached even into the sphere of reference works. Thus in the *Taschenbrockhaus zum Zeitgeschehen* of 1942, all higher generals are listed, including Colonel General von Fritsch, who had fallen in the Polish campaign, but not Blomberg.

Blomberg himself describes his condemnation in his notes with his usual semantic vagueness: "Since 1938 neither General v. Fritsch nor my person was named in journalism and propaganda when the building of the Wehrmacht was spoken of. (...) I was extinguished for this world, and indeed it for me. Sometimes Gen. v. Seeckt was named, and otherwise only the Führer (...). Without the Führer the new Wehrmacht would not have been built up. He alone created the political and economic preconditions

for it. But the construction itself he had left to others and had scarcely interfered in it. He had no time left for that and, as it seemed to me then, no inclination either. (...) One had then ordered a 'dead silence' over those who had most strongly and most decisively directed the building of the Wehrmacht; that had to be accepted." By "others" and "those," Blomberg could only have meant himself. Blomberg was right: after his departure abroad he was "coffined and buried."

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038

RECEPTION OF THE BLOMBERG AFFAIR ABROAD

That Blomberg, as it were as a reward, was allowed to go abroad on a "pleasure trip" especially annoyed Goebbels, who at the same time had to concern himself with the consequences of the scandal: "News of the day: Blomberg departed abroad with wife and 50,000 marks in foreign currency." A few days later: "Meanwhile Blomberg is on a world trip with his creature. What a disappointment!" Later, angrily: "Blomberg on Capri. They want once more to show him the obscene pictures of his wife. B.Z. [Berliner Zeitung, the author notes] brings report of his trip. I block reports for the whole press. I hope that in the great personnel reshuffle the actual motives will go completely under." On 30 January 1938 he notes in his diary: "Incidentally, the first suspicious comments are appearing in the foreign press in the Blomberg case. So it is time. Now something must happen. Otherwise the matter will grow over our heads." The next day his unrest grows because Hitler "has not yet come to any decision": "The foreign press is already whispering. It is now time to cut the knot." Already one day later: "the foreign press is going at it sharply. Rumors are buzzing everywhere. But so far no one is getting at the core of the matter. But that will not last long. I hardly believe anymore that, after waiting so long, we shall still get away with our skins intact." On 3 February — at latest on 4 February — Hitler's decision is finally supposed to fall. Goebbels breathes a sigh of relief: "And then the crisis is over, above all the eternal strain on the nerves. The foreign press is swarming with rumors. It is coming ever closer to the core of the matter. So act! And then appear boldly and let nothing show." On 4 February 1938 the Propaganda Minister states that the foreign press is "full of German crisis rumors," which were passing "more and more into the people." Now Goebbels permits himself a cautious criticism of Hitler's hesitation: "It seems we are waiting a little too long." After the "German reorganization" had been announced on 4 February as a "great sensation at home and abroad": "So that would be done. The world has its morsels. It will have to digest them. The hardest part is done. I am dog-tired, but very happy. And for the first time in a long time I can really sleep again." On 5 February the foreign press, which "is indulging in wild assumptions," is "by and large groping in the dark." Goebbels: "In any case, the blow seems to be succeeding. What one woman can cause. And such a one besides!"

Hitler too showed himself uneasy about the possible reactions abroad. Goebbels notes: "Führer keeps asking about foreign press. It is relatively good. In Paris and London somewhat stunned, in Vienna uneasy, in Rome full of joy and satisfaction. Mussolini sends the Führer a pompous telegram, which we first have to tone down somewhat in translation so that we can publish it." On the following day the Propaganda Minister registers abroad "still great guessing. But not malicious. The worst is now past."

That, for the first time, the traditional festivities commemorating the takeover of power on 30 January 1933 were apparently postponed without reason to a later date because of the secret events around the

change at the top of the Wehrmacht aroused attention and highly strung curiosity abroad: "It had also been noticed outside the Reich that the Führer had not, as in previous years, convened the Reichstag on 30 January, but only on 20 February. Initially, a reshuffling within the Reich government and the Wehrmacht leadership, undertaken on 4 February, suggested important plans for the year 1938." This postponement was cloaked with the explanation that Hitler had wanted "before his Reichstag speech first to await the meeting with Schuschnigg and its first results." In fact the Austrian card then proved to be a trump and once again helped Hitler out of a difficult situation. In reality the reaction of mockery and malicious joy that Hitler feared not only remained within limits; it did not occur at all.

The reports in the foreign press nevertheless had extraordinarily angered Hitler and caused him, in a speech before the Reichstag in the Berlin Kroll Opera on 20 February 1938, to settle accounts with biting irony with the "pitiful wretches" of the foreign press. He dealt with relish with the failures of the press and cited as examples "that twenty German officers and three generals had fled to Salzburg, that fourteen generals with Ludendorff's corpse had fled to Prague (...)." One must admit this was an especially extravagant invention. Hitler then continued: "In recent weeks you will have heard the simply incomprehensible talk for us of certain foreign journalists who in the year 1938 speak of the influence of National Socialism having just now taken hold of the Foreign Office, or that at present a struggle is taking place between the Reichswehr — that meanwhile there is a German Wehrmacht, these pitiful wretches have slept through — and the Party, or that the National Socialist 'wing' is just now in the process of bringing the economy under its spell, and more nonsense of the same kind." Then he took up the truly explosive complex: "If today it serves the inner reassurance of foreign wise men, then as far as we are concerned they may calmly believe that in Germany there are God knows what differences between Wehrmacht and National Socialism. We grant them this kind of inner self-satisfaction without further ado. But if they should ever draw other conclusions from it, then let the following be said to them here: there is in Germany no problem of National Socialist state and National Socialist Party, and no problem of National Socialist Party and National Socialist Wehrmacht. In this Reich everyone is a National Socialist who stands in any responsible position...!" Then Hitler gave free rein to his irritation: "Moreover it is not my intention to take the honorable German officer corps especially under protection against the slanders of an international journalism. This is also not necessary. For among journalists there are two sorts of people: truth-loving ones and, on the other hand, mendacious, inferior swindlers, deceivers of peoples, and warmongers. But there is only one sort of German officer." With emphasis he then announced: "I am therefore no longer willing to accept without reply the unbridled method of a continuous spitting upon and insulting of our country and our people. From now on we will answer, and indeed answer with National Socialist thoroughness." The domestic press directed by Goebbels reported uniformly on Hitler's attacks against the foreign press: "With great sharpness the Führer repeatedly turned against the mendacity and malice with which the so-called world press undermines peace and obstructs understanding among peoples."

The Blomberg case was also thematized in the exile press, which in its presentation of events largely followed the foreign newspapers. Thus, for example, the *Neue Weltbühne* on 10 February 1938 could at least state as the reason for Blomberg's fall that he had not married "according to his station," and the *Pariser Tageszeitung* wrote on 5 February 1938 of the "cold January 1938." Under the headline "Hitler Narrowly Escapes Disaster," the personnel reshufflings in Germany could be summarized. Despite the many speculations, however, no foreign or German exile newspaper really came close to the explosive truth. In the *Neue Weltbühne*, an organ of the emigrated German left intelligentsia, the reason for Blomberg's fall was seen — faithful to the previous line of one-sided overestimation of the Wehrmacht as the actually determining power factor of the Third Reich — as follows: "The prehistory: the Reich Egg Utilization Office supplied, in the person of Gruhn, the occasion for this power struggle over the Third Reich. Blomberg's marriage offered the harmless occasion to demand a correction of the whole

policy.” In misrecognition of the occasion, which was anything but “harmless,” the author of the article went on in the further text to the finding that Hitler had treated “the great political conflict as a personnel question,” and reached a huge misjudgment: “The Wehrmacht remains a state within the state (...) The Wehrmacht is autonomous. It has overcome Blomberg’s attempt at gentle coordination and the crude attacks of the Party leaders.” As the result it was established that Hitler had not been able to achieve a victory over the army — “he would have had to smash it.” At the end it then said, however, strangely contradictorily and at the same time truly: “The world has greatly overestimated the strength of this country. Hopefully it will not now fall into the error of underestimating the adventurous blood of its holders of power.”

On the subject of Blomberg, in the same issue, the following remarks were found: “That His Excellency, the General Field Marshal, cast an eye on the commoner named Gruhn, Aryan, blond, slender, twenty-six years old, employee of the Reich Egg Utilization Office, although the mother is a masseuse in Neukölln or, according to newer reports, a midwife — that could almost make him sympathetic. But unfortunately Herr von Blomberg, when he, accompanied by Hitler and Göring, raised Fräulein Gruhn to Frau Reich War Minister, at most thought that those ruling in Germany today are permitted all that the laws forbid the ruled. The honored marshal imagined the resumption of his private life as, so to speak, the exception to the rule. It will be all right, he had hoped, and perhaps it would have been all right too; the uniformed notables might even have accommodated themselves to kissing the hand of the lady from the Reich Egg Utilization Office, if politics had not played into love.”

Also in the *Neue Weltbühne*, one week later, appeared the reflections of the philosopher Ernst Bloch on the subject of Blomberg. Bloch prophesied that the events in Berlin meant the beginning of the end of NS rule, and did not rule out a military dictatorship or even a “farce monarchy”: “There is no question of a victory over the Reichswehr, as was at first, rather shortsightedly, presumed. The fourth of February is rather the beginning of the end of the Nazis (...)” His justification for this prognosis, standing in the tradition of Marxism: “The Nazi is no longer profitable for the ruling class (...). Thus the Nazis, formerly so useful for the ruling class, have become a burden.” In the same issue, however, it had to be admitted elsewhere that the countless bloodthirsty “reports from the Reich” were wish-dreams of an overstimulated imagination. The author of the article now took refuge in moving forward: “It was a week of rumors. In quick succession it was reported: flight of German generals to Austria and Switzerland; flight of the ex-Crown Prince; mutiny in Stolp and Allenstein; officers shot; German border closure. That is a small selection of the rumors that concerned German domestic policy.” As emerges from the article, in Poland people had even written of street fighting in Berlin and Munich. Nevertheless — so the consolation ran — abroad there prevailed agreement “about the deeper causes of the crisis that had suddenly broken out so violently” and about the “sham solution” of 4 February: “That the National Socialist state is terribly weakened is (...) recognized as fact.”

On 12 February 1938 the emigrated journalist Leopold Schwarzschild published his interpretation of the “German crisis,” which was substantially more accurate. In contrast to Ernst Bloch, he reached a result that later development seemed to justify: “The Nazification of the Wehrmacht is an expression of the fact that the decision for an early war has now been made. It has the effect that now the Wehrmacht leadership too are protagonists of the determination to wage war in 1938 or 1939.” In the higher ranks, against Blomberg, a growing bitterness and the wish had “concretized” to “get rid of him”: “Simply to call Blomberg a Nazi will not do. In many respects he was oppositional (...). People waited for the possibility of maneuvering Blomberg out and exchanging him for a chief, preferably Fritsch, who would pursue stronger policy. This opportunity seemed to have come when the marshal married Fräulein Gruhn, the secretary from the Reich Administrative Office. The chronicle scandaleuse has to this day not revealed what qualities clung to Fräulein Gruhn that gave certainty that her young-old

husband would have to fall over them. That she came from the social lowlands could neither have remained unknown to Hitler, who himself acted as witness to the wedding, nor would it have put him in a compulsory situation. On the contrary, from that he could, if needed, have made the most beautiful ‘national-community’ magic. Other blemishes must have been discovered on the daughter of a mother who is described sometimes as a masseuse, sometimes as head of a massage institute.” Schwarzschild finally came to the dialectical result that actually everything was as before: “The army remains distanced from Nazism as before. Everything around it is pure theater.” “Foam-beating” was, for example, “the proclamation that Hitler is assuming the supreme command, for he had long had it.”

Looking back, it is astonishing that the otherwise so sharp-eared foreign observers were unable to recognize the real reasons for Blomberg’s and Fritsch’s removal. This fact certainly also resulted from there being no interest among the decisive circles of the Wehrmacht in spreading the embarrassing details of the Blomberg case in public. That may have been a weak consolation for Hitler after the affair. The unexpectedly favorable solution of the scandal that at first seemed so ominous, which instead of leading to the feared worldwide disgrace ended in success for Hitler, animated Joseph Goebbels much later, in a similar situation — namely after 20 July 1944 — to the following argument: “In February 1938 a great personnel crisis broke out in our state structure; five weeks later the Ostmark returned to the Reich. Each time our enemies believed that National Socialism and the Führer were finished; each time they experienced a cruel disappointment.”

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039

“DULCE ET DECORUM EST PRO PATRIA MORI”

For Blomberg, a world collapsed when — as he wrote — during the second stage of his world journey, after a stay in Rome, on Capri “the document of his dismissal and the obligatory letter of thanks from the Führer” reached him. Despite the spatial distance from Berlin and the new role as a private person, he did not succeed in forgetting his profession; and he was not to get over his disempowerment until his death. With the loss of his position, his deeply internalized life goal was at the same time made impossible: the dulce et decorum est pro patria mori, the collective credo of his caste. Soon anger and bitterness set in over the events which — in his own judgment unjustifiably — had catapulted him into the void; and he sought forgetfulness at the side of his young wife and in the distance that had fascinated him since earliest youth.

He writes: “When I left Berlin, I could not yet reckon with a complete separation from my previous environment, as then occurred; the assurances that the Führer and Göring had given me did not allow such thoughts even to arise. As soon as I had crossed the national border, there occurred, guided or permitted, a separation which, after it had taken place, I then regarded by my own decision as unbridgeable.” The former War Minister was tormented by his sinking down into an “unperson,” for not only did his comrades avoid him; his family and friends too distanced themselves from him because of his “mésalliance.” Blomberg tried to put into words his disappointment over this behavior: “The previous environment (...) merely followed its natural impulse, to turn away from the one who had fallen into disgrace. Of those who stood close to me, who knew me exactly, and who owed me all sorts of things, I could rightly say that they had failed where I could have demanded something special from

them.”

He held fast to his marriage. In his memoirs he explains: “I chose as the only dignified path that of separation. I will never impose upon myself the task of coming forward with an opportunistic confession of guilt [OCR unclear in source; probably ‘Sündenbekenntnis’]. I would always refuse to appear as a dusty decorative piece of my former merits, as a ghost of my past. A cut tablecloth cannot be mended. For me, humanly warm relations can henceforth open and endure only through attraction, not through conventions of ‘rank and station.’”

In his bitterness and isolation, Blomberg intensified into a veritable psychosis of mistrust. The suspicion repeatedly formulated in his notes — that because of his “cautiousness,” as a supposed “brake shoe,” he had been systematically pensioned off — fed not least the myth of a plot against the generals.

Keitel too, as Blomberg’s formerly closest collaborator, gives information in his memoirs about Blomberg’s growing mistrust: “In the first period Blomberg still wrote to me regularly and had various wishes, which I was glad to fulfill for him. A few weeks after his departure I received a telegram from him from Italy: ‘Send son Axel immediately with passport and foreign currency for travel expenses, in order to discuss most important matters.’ Presumably the Job’s-message of his dismissal had arrived with Blomberg. When he [Axel] came back after eight days, he brought me a letter from his father, which the latter had written after long discussions with his son. In the letter he asked me to convey to Hitler that he wished to separate from the woman again, though he made the realization of this intention dependent on his being received back into favor and reinstated in his office.” The letter has not survived, so it remains unclear whether Blomberg in fact believed that his fate depended on Hitler alone and had no conception of Hitler’s constrained position with regard to the attitude of the general officer corps. At any rate, it is revealing — if Keitel reproduces the content of the letter correctly — that Blomberg believed he could again step to the head of the Wehrmacht if only he declared himself ready to separate from his wife. This request would already have been absurd because of the impossibility of undoing all the personnel and, above all, organizational changes that had meanwhile occurred. Keitel relates that he had asked Hitler “to read the letter himself”: “As I had expected, the Führer rejected the condition without reservation; at that time he had indeed suggested to him that the marriage immediately be declared void. After Blomberg had then rejected that as an impossible demand, everything had then taken its course and could no longer be undone.” Keitel continues: “However gently I wrote this to Blomberg, he always remained of the belief that I had, out of egoism (...), caused Hitler’s refusal.” As Keitel confirms, it was also not possible for Hitler to redeem, when the time came, the promise he had spontaneously made at Blomberg’s dismissal: to bring Blomberg back to his side in the event of war. The difficulties would have been unforeseeable.

Blomberg himself had reckoned with Hitler’s refusal. The attempt nevertheless to obtain participation in the war was a desperate attempt in which any employment would have been acceptable to him, as emerges from his memoirs: “I had written to Colonel General Keitel in order, through him, to ask the Führer for wartime employment for myself, emphasizing that, without regard to my rank, any employment with the troops would be acceptable to me. I was not confidently disposed toward the fulfillment of my request, but I could still imagine that in war, and especially in a war of the scale of the one approaching, reasons lying in private life, or that should lie there, would not exclude the employment of a useful man.”

In order not to “hit Blomberg in the face in the gravest way” additionally, Hitler at the outbreak of war also refused a high command assignment for Fritsch, for which Brauchitsch and Keitel urgently

advocated. Conversely, in order not to hit the Army Command in the face, he had to break his promise to Blomberg. Hitler's army adjutant Engel states that Blomberg's request for employment was presented to Hitler with extremely uneasy feelings: "Keitel had reservations about even showing this letter to the Führer. After consultation with Siewert I was able to speak to the Führer about it today and asked him, if possible, to refrain from any employment of Blomberg; it would not be understood in the army (...). He emphasized once more clearly that he would consider any employment at all only if Blomberg had separated from his wife." As Engel adds, Hitler added: "His [Blomberg's] merits, so to speak, in having handed over to him as trustee the hundred-thousand-man army, and his whole attitude toward National Socialism, he would, despite everything, never forget."

Under the given circumstances Hitler could make known to Blomberg neither his reasons for refusal nor his positive memories. It is understandable — and this also emerges repeatedly from his writings — that Blomberg suffered greatly under Hitler's wordless rejection, his "breach of word," as he had to believe it to be. Hurt and increasingly sarcastic, he shut himself off more and more from the world, of which he learned only from press and radio reports and through his wife, who worked in the spa office in the town hall of Bad Wiessee. That Blomberg did in fact suspect Keitel, certainly not entirely without reason, of being a "traitor" emerges from his notes. When, immediately before the German invasion of Poland, he wrote to Keitel "in order, through him, to ask the Führer for wartime employment," he received on 31 August 1939 a telegram "with a negative answer, referring to his letter, which reached me beforehand, and in which it was said approximately that in view of the development of things in Germany the Führer could not at present return to the arrangement envisaged at my dismissal for the event of war. In my heart I had expected this shabby reply. Whoever may forgive this decision; I do not." Elsewhere Blomberg writes: "Meanwhile I had definitively learned that the Führer's assurances to me from January 1938 no longer existed. They 'could no longer be realized,' so ran the formula. Nothing had changed in my situation that could by itself have brought about this reversal." What remained hidden from him was that it was not his situation, but Hitler's, that had changed decisively. Thus his suspicion remains unjustified, but understandable from his isolation. He writes: "Rather, this reversal probably lay in the planning from the beginning, but only now was stripped of all consideration and communicated with laconic brevity. I had to occupy myself with the bitter thought that in the event of war I would sit at home. In the Wehrmacht, from whose construction a just view will never be able to separate me, the Führer had no more place for me."

In reality Hitler often remembered his faithful Blomberg with sympathy and recognition, as Engel already confirms above. Thus Goebbels too noted in his diary on 9 March 1943: "With a certain melancholy the Führer speaks of Blomberg, whose loyalty toward his person he praises extraordinarily. If all generals in decisive positions were as loyal to the Führer as he, things would stand better with the Wehrmacht." On 20 February 1938, before the Reichstag, that is, before the world public, Hitler had also demonstratively celebrated Blomberg as follows: "But at this point I wish to express my thanks and those of the German people for the infinite loyalty and loyal work of this soldier for the new Reich and its Wehrmacht. [Strong applause.] As such, it will historically never again be separable from the history of the founding of this Reich." The "obligatory letter of thanks" that Blomberg received on Capri, and that was published on 5 February, was therefore anything but a formality, and closed with the "expression of deeply moved gratitude." Blomberg's notes are silent about such friendlinesses.

After the Blomberg couple had left Capri, they traveled for three weeks to Amalfi, in order to travel the coast roads and Sorrento. They were in Sorrento when Hitler had Austria occupied in mid-March 1938. Blomberg: "I deciphered the event from Italian newspapers. The world held its breath. The Ides of March had again confirmed their reputation. For me personally the question arose whether, in the event of war, the Führer would stand by his firm assurance about my then-commencing employment or not.

In good faith I sent a telegram of congratulation and received no answer. I should have been startled by this, if I had not at that time firmly believed in what had been expressly and solemnly assured to me.” For the General Field Marshal in enforced retirement, the pain lay less in the fact that “from no one and for years a sign of life from the former environment” reached him, than rather in the fact “that one had excluded [him] from participation in the war of decision. (...) I needed not and could not forget that, at parting in January 1938, the Führer had assured me in the strongest words of supreme command in war (...). Between this fact and the complete elimination that fell to me there yawned an abyss which I could only with difficulty bridge. And yet I had to achieve this in order to remain upright in soul.” Hitler had no choice but to break the promise he had given Blomberg, to bring him back at latest at the outbreak of war. Anything else would have met the sharpest rejection in the officer corps, especially in the general officer corps, and would have endangered Hitler’s myth. Blomberg was unable to recognize this dilemma.

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RETREAT (1938–1945)

While in summer 1938 Japan’s war against China began, the Blombergs continued their journey via Genoa and Lake Como to Java, in order from there to reach India by luxury steamer, a country that had long fascinated Blomberg. After the joint world journey, the couple returned to Germany on 14 January 1939 and moved into Blomberg’s “Berghaus” in Bad Wiessee on Lake Tegernsee. The chance purchase now became a fortunate arrangement. The Blomberg house, as it is still called by the locals today, still exists. The idyllic estate in Bavarian style lies below the Hotel Sonnenbichl. The von Blomberg family, after it was returned by the Allies, could not keep it and sold it in the mid-1950s to the grandfather of the present owner. Blomberg lived on the secluded Berghof wholly — as he expressed it — “differently” than before, but despite the trials he felt happy, since he was “separated off” in a peaceful corner. And, as Blomberg repeatedly explained to witnesses, and as can also be inferred from his notes and letters from the war years, the marriage with Margarethe Gruhn, burdened with such catastrophic consequences, turned out quite positively. As he emphasized, he owed to her at least seven more happy years together.

From the perspective of his writing room, a true “peaceful corner” in a world of war, the former War Minister of the Third Reich, with the Bavarian mountains before his eyes, commented on the course of the war and the “whirl of monstrous events that began in the year 1938 and from year to year rose into a tumult of the world.” Throughout the entire Second World War he remained, under compulsion, in the quiet and seclusion of Upper Bavaria: a sharp-sighted, embittered, and passive observer of the course of the war, which he could follow only from afar. He spoke little, wrote much, went walking while the inferno took its course. Thrown back upon the everyday cares of human life, he began to follow his inclination for observation, waiting, reception, and Nietzschean amor fati. He entrenched himself in his small writing room on the first floor of his house and wrote his memoirs. During this time he declined physically and became ill more and more often — presumably the beginnings of an undiagnosed intestinal cancer. In these phases of illness it was not possible for him to work on his memoirs, which offers a further explanation for their unfinished state. Letters that he wrote to his children — above all to Sybille — he now sometimes dictated to his wife.

The general had a difficult, but emotionally very close, relationship with Sybille. This arose not only from the fact that after her mother's death, in the period from 1932 to about 1936, she had managed her father's household and accompanied him on official occasions; in her love for literature and philosophy she also stood intellectually closest to him. The letters to Sybille grant an insight into his psychological condition during the war years — at least insofar as, with his closed character, he allowed his formulated thoughts and emotions to be recognized. They show his historical fatalism, which finds expression in the constant repetition and perception of Schopenhauer's dictum "What happens, happens necessarily"; they show his bitterness in view of his own fate and the development of world history, which he was now forced to follow, as it were, through a glass wall.

He received news only through the official announcements of the government; formal and informal contacts with circles close to the government and military had almost entirely ebbed away. Enforced inactivity tormented him, since he had learned to see the fulfillment of his existence only in war. Peace meant for him only "approach and preparation." Hitler's assumption of supreme command over the army around Christmas 1941 and Brauchitsch's dismissal were later commented on by Blomberg in his notes as follows: "The illness [of Brauchitsch, the author notes] was no pretext, but I was convinced that, even without it, the Führer would sooner or later have taken this step. I considered it justified in the sense of the totality that now prevailed. The Führer took over command of the army with an effective order of the day. One sentence read: 'The initiation of decisive war measures is imminent.' Today — 1943/44 — we certainly ask ourselves what was meant by that, for we could not recognize it, but at the time it strengthened our confidence. Not only I myself considered the new command order appropriate; I also heard the same judgment from soldiers' circles. Besides this, I had no reason to cherish affection or personal regret for Colonel General von Brauchitsch. My position toward him had changed compared with earlier times. I had had to observe narrowness and arrogance in him. Nor had he understood how to find and maintain, toward the Führer, the Party, and the movement that was passing through the age, the kind of relationship that was advantageous to the position of the army within the structure of the Wehrmacht and the state. The army had already under his predecessor been burdened with the reproach of being reactionary, and not entirely without reason, as I myself felt in my official relations. Under Brauchitsch that had not become better. Unfortunately this worked to the disadvantage of the army. If only in 1938 the Führer, from my twofold proposal which he demanded, had chosen General von Reichenau as Commander-in-Chief of the Army. It would have done the army good."

It was his sons Axel and Henning who had followed the father's credo and fell victim to the war. Axel, a major in the Luftwaffe, was killed on 19 May 1942 during the failed Baghdad enterprise in support of the uprising against the British in Iraq, when, during landing, Iraqi anti-aircraft fire shot him down; a gun crew had mistakenly taken the aircraft for a British "single raider." Henning, lieutenant colonel and commander of Panzer Detachment 190, fell in North Africa. In Blomberg's notes on this: "On 23 November 1942 an adjutant of the deputy general command in Munich brought me the news that my eldest and last son Henning had fallen. On 22 November, at Mateur south of Bizerte in Tunisia, he had been killed by an enemy low-flying attack. On 23 November 1942 he was buried in Tunis. I had had to give up both my sons. Axel found his grave in Baghdad, Henning in Tunis. The letters of condolence at the death of my sons brought more torment than comfort. My answers had to sound as conditional as the well-meant but basically meaningless sympathy of others. Mussolini's publication *I Speak with Bruno* [what is meant is Mussolini's book *Parlo con Bruno* (Milan 1942), a 'requiem' for the death of his son, the author notes] had always seemed to me an incomprehensible prostitution. After Henning's death my rejection was called forth once again." Blomberg, who had already had to accept the death of his two brothers in the First World War, now had painfully to mourn the death of his two sons in war —

a war in whose preparation he had played a decisive part and in which he himself was now not allowed to participate. On 26 November 1942 Hitler sent Blomberg a letter of condolence from Führer Headquarters. In it he informed the “dear Herr Field Marshal” that after his son’s “heroic death” he had promoted him to lieutenant colonel.

The tensions between him and his children also pained Blomberg deeply. He sought reasons everywhere except in himself and in his second marriage. Embittered, he wrote: “Keitel, who knew the whole story, was reckless enough to convey this infamous lie to my grown children, which led to a far-reaching estrangement. (...) From my children too I would have expected different conduct. To be sure, things had also been presented to them in distorted form, to the point of lies, but that should not have been decisive. What could I expect from friends and previous confidants if those closest to me set such an example. (...) I fear that the loss of external comforts that now occurred also consciously or unconsciously played a role.” Interviews by the author with children and grandchildren, as well as Blomberg’s letters to his daughter-in-law Ruth, née von Hammerstein, Henning’s wife, and to his daughter Sybille, prove however that the family never broke off contact with Blomberg.

One of the friends who disappointed him was his former naval adjutant von Friedeburg. Already during the three years of Blomberg’s service in Königsberg, a very close personal relationship had developed between the two families. This had been strengthened further by the early death of Charlotte von Blomberg and had caused Blomberg to ask Admiral Raeder to appoint Friedeburg as his adjutant, which he then was from January 1933 until autumn 1936. Blomberg would have liked to keep him; Friedeburg, however, pressed for transfer back to the navy and for a shipboard command. His successor was Wangenheim. Since Blomberg’s dismissal in 1938 the Friedeburgs had stood in loose written contact with Blomberg. During a vacation stay in Bad Wiessee in summer 1943, the later General Admiral Friedeburg asked for a discussion with Blomberg at a neutral place. Blomberg, however, insisted on a visit by Friedeburg to his house, which the latter rejected as out of the question, since he did not wish to meet the lady of the house. “My husband,” Friedeburg’s wife Ursula reports, “came back into our room after this conversation and the rebuff by Blomberg very agitated and sat down at once in order, in a letter, once more to make clear to Blomberg his standpoint, which he after all also shared with the Blomberg children. (...) To this he never received a proposal as an answer, so that the two weeks of vacation passed without a reunion. With that the connection broke off entirely.” Thus the final break between the former friends was sealed. Bitter and defiant, Blomberg stated: “Whoever sits in loss has no friends.” He defended his marriage without reservation and never made a declaration that would have shown knowledge of his wife’s questionable reputation. For him, his “pain over exclusion from the war had become encapsulated.” He was never to see Friedeburg again. As the last Commander-in-Chief of the German Kriegsmarine, Friedeburg took his own life after signing the unconditional capitulation of the Wehrmacht in Reims and Karlshorst and after Dönitz’s arrest on 23 May 1945.

Psychologically interesting is Blomberg’s contradictory evaluation of himself, which fractures slightly in the course of the progressing war. With the passage of time he increasingly intensified himself into the role of victim of a conspiracy. In American captivity his account assumed the following form: “After I had left Germany — which the conspirators had above all wanted — a prepared campaign was launched with the aim of spreading, in the Wehrmacht and in the Berlin ministries, the account that I had been given the choice either to hold to my position or to my marriage. This additional insult served to deepen the break between me and the Wehrmacht, precisely as had been intended.”

The brutal reality of the total war that he had theoretically anticipated and prepared for decades revealed itself to Blomberg when he heard that in April 1943 mass graves of shot Polish officers had

been found in the forest of Katyn near Smolensk. The reaction of the USA and England, which placed themselves on the “side of the Bolsheviks,” shocked him. He noted: “Politics has nothing to do with humanity, but only with power. The striving for power, beside hunger and love, belongs to the elemental forces of human beings. They are the demons that drive us. Where does Kant remain with his categories and his imperative? Right and truth, humanity and honesty were, in relation to questions of power, only fragile conventions. How flat the slogans of a past age seem in view of the reality of war. One can learn from the discovery of the corpses at Katyn how the Bolsheviks assess the ‘people.’ They knew that it falls helplessly into the hands of every leadership, indeed of tyranny, once the leading strata have been eliminated. Afterward the rest had become a slave mass that could be shaped by every grasp. Over there they seem to look at the people without veils of illusion, while among us the opposite was practiced. In this I sometimes had to think of slumber in a predator house.”

In Blomberg’s notes it is striking that, as the outcome of the war became increasingly foreseeable, the feeling of disappointment over shattered dreams far outweighed other feelings, such as grief over the many victims. He contradicts himself, in that on the one hand he succeeds in praising Hitler’s genius and reaffirming his belief in him, while on the other hand he begins more and more to demonize him. The cause of his ambivalent view of the dictator surely lay more in his disappointment over the break with him than in recognition of the cruelty and senselessness of the war. Still shortly after the end of the war he wrote: “In order to breathe, one had to be able to hold fast to an authority; it was the result of years of totalitarian leadership that only Hitler came into question as a possible support. In my inner self I knew that we could not win the war after we had begun the eastern campaign and declared war on the USA. But man’s way is to hope so long as breath still goes on; so I expected that Hitler, whose strength I had known until 1938, would preserve us from the worst defeat.”

In his prison diaries it says, not much later, more angrily: “How far a demon of destruction drove Hitler, I learned only toward the end of the war and afterward. His inhuman will to rule and to count, and his complete lack of judgment in the years from 1938 onward, discredited and destroyed his work leap by leap and dragged the German people down with it. Earlier it seemed to me doubtful to apply to an exceptional phenomenon like Hitler an ordinary measure in judging his nature and actions. In that I have relearned. The final judgment on a leader, statesman, and commander is simply not to be separated from his success or failure. The retrospective connection must also change our judgment of things lying further back. It probably lies in the course of the world, even though many objections arise against it, that the assessment of individual traits in a successful Hitler would turn out differently than in a failed one (...).”

During the interrogations in witness custody, the former War Minister was to express himself critically, though not free from the need for exculpation, about the dictator: “After 1938 he began to go politically insane, ruined all the good that he had ever done (...). We had never thought that Hitler could be such a brutal demon as he showed himself after 20 July 1944, and even more after the revelations about concentration camps and atrocities in the East. (...) Hitler had become a cruel monster. He, who once had been a true leader of his people, became a despot, alien to his nation, for whom Germany’s fate no longer formed an ideological goal, but rather a tool in his insane striving for power. He must really have lived in a world full of pathologically determined illusions. There can be no other explanation for his prophecy of 30 January 1945 of ‘a turn in the fortunes of war’ and ‘complete victory at the end of the struggle.’”

Blomberg’s public and private isolation became the central focus of his reflections during and about the war. He sought one possible cause for the estrangement from Hitler in Hitler’s mistrust toward the Wehrmacht and its leadership. After the Stauffenberg assassination attempt he found his supposition

confirmed, and the entry in his diary at the same time gives an interesting assessment by Blomberg of the position of the Wehrmacht in the Hitler state: “In those days [January 1945, the author notes] I was written that the Reichsführer SS personally commanded the troops on the Upper Rhine. Everywhere the SS had to step in. The entire replacement system was now subordinated to the SS. The Wehrmacht replacement inspectorates were subordinate to SS leaders and police leaders who had been appointed generals of the Waffen-SS. The war schools of the army and the Waffen-SS had been combined under one inspector. The army administration had been taken over by the SS (...). The abdication of the old-style army could not have been carried out more thoroughly. For some time I had foreseen such a development. The catastrophe of 20 July 1944 had then turned it into an avalanche. The deepest reason that had led to the confusions and then to radical solutions was mutual mistrust. Already in 1935 Göring, in his hunting lodge on the Darss not far from Warnemünde, had asked me ‘whether in a war the generals would obey the Führer.’ At that time I believed I had talked him out of the absurdity of the question. After I had been pushed aside in 1938 in order to unite the factual leadership of the Wehrmacht in the hands of the Führer, mutual mistrust and a lack of mutual understanding must soon have begun. That was not so important so long as in the war we were stringing victory after victory together. The mutual alienation deepened once we were struck by continuing setbacks. It seemed that in the end there was no load-bearing bridge left. Thus it came to 20 July 1944 and its consequences. To the upheaval of our time there evidently also had to belong the now-occurring change in the structure of the Wehrmacht, especially of the army, which until then alone had still towered like a pillar in an otherwise plowed-up state landscape.”

Blomberg knew that his nonparticipation in the war had met with incomprehension, for many officers and others who were not informed about the details of his departure were astonished over his staying at home. Typical is the remark by Rudolf Hess during their shared imprisonment in Nuremberg after 1945, when the “Blomberg case” was discussed. He made to him the “contemptuous” reproach that he had not gone “to the front.”

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041

AGONY AND DEATH

In the months and years after the collapse of the Third Reich, not only the activists and “fellow travelers” of the National Socialist movement had to justify themselves before the tribunals of the victors, later before denazification courts and denazification committees; the so-called “militarists” too now had to answer for their participation in war crimes. At the same time, the Allied court declared the Gestapo, the Security Service, and the SS criminal organizations, but not the General Staff and the High Command of the Wehrmacht. In public opinion this was interpreted — down into the 1990s — as an acquittal for the Wehrmacht.

The former War Minister Werner von Blomberg, who himself had not taken part in the Second World War, was placed under arrest in summer 1945. On 30 May 1945 he writes: “Yesterday afternoon two Captains of the American Gestapo [sic] came with a German interpreter. A few superficial questions were asked, then I received, on a notebook page, a kind of safe-conduct: ‘Gen. v. Blomberg cleared by CIC 910/44 Tegernsee Signature Capt. CIC.’” On 1 June: “Yesterday I received another questioning

visit from the three officers [officials?] of the C.I.C., at their head the colonel of this institution at Tegernsee. The visit was not pleasant, not so much in the manner of questioning as in the forms. I was declared a prisoner in my house, though one who may go into the village of Wiessee. (...) It seems that the accusation is being drawn together against me that I bear responsibility for the rearmament of the German Wehrmacht. That cannot be denied.”

Blomberg’s imprisonment took place on 4 June 1945. It is probable that the confiscation of his house followed in autumn 1945. Shortly before the end of the war, the daughters Ursula Bürker, with three children, and Dorothee Keitel, with five children, had moved into the Berghaus with Werner and Margarethe von Blomberg. They lived there together until his arrest and the subsequent confiscation of the house by the American Army. In the following period Margarethe, as well as Ursula and Dorothee with their families, lived in various houses in the town of Wiessee. Margarethe von Blomberg remained there until after her husband’s death; the daughters for several more years. Blomberg’s honorary saber and both field marshal’s batons were confiscated at the end of the war, together with numerous other objects, by members of the American occupation force. Apart from the memoirs later found in the Library of Congress in Washington and returned, nothing is known about the whereabouts of these personal objects.

During his imprisonment — from 4 June 1945 to 10 February 1946 in Nuremberg and Oberursel near Frankfurt — Blomberg, deeply broken by the collapse of his world, sank into fatalism. In his cell, which he called his “monastery,” he kept a diary. These “prison diaries” — 3 September 1945 to 10 February 1946 — document the progress of the interrogations during the Nuremberg trials, daily prison life, his mood of downfall after the German collapse, as well as his physical decline, which was caused by the symptoms of intestinal cancer. On 12 October 1945 he notes: “Interrogation about two decrees of mine, which come from the files of the Naval Command: from autumn 1933 about defensive measures against possible sanctions because of leaving Geneva, and a preparatory measure for the event of an armed conflict after the declaration of our military service obligation of May 1935. Weight: 72.2 kg with clothing.”

Full of disgust, Blomberg followed the statements of his former comrades during the interrogations in Nuremberg, and observed in speechless amazement how, in view of the changed signs brought by the lost war, “white turned into black and vice versa,” and how “oath, duty, and obedience were stamped as crimes.” He saw his world turned upside down and doubted the meaning of life and his life maxims, which he had, as it were, to abandon if he wanted to survive. Many officers, in the course of the great collection of “Persil certificates,” remembered alleged “acts of resistance” against the NS regime, and not a few of them suddenly wanted to have been secret accomplices or even participants in 20 July 1944, and to have escaped with their lives only through their skillful camouflage or the silence of the victims. Many allowed their defense attorneys to stylize them into convinced opponents of war and transformed themselves, in view of the sanctions threatening them, into heroic resisters and martyrs, into peace fighters ready for sacrifice. Against this background, the victors repeatedly expressed their astonishment at how the Hitler regime, with so many secret opponents and saboteurs, had not only been able to last so long, but at times had also been able to achieve unexpected successes.

In captivity, and involved in the search by the generals for an endurable interpretation of their own collective biography, Blomberg’s illness worsened; he became increasingly depressed, no longer ate, and became more and more apathetic. This condition worsened because letters from his wife failed to arrive. When, after many months, a letter finally reached him, Margarethe informed him that “all Blomberg’s silver” had been stolen from the attic in inexplicable fashion, and that she planned to leave her husband so that he could care for his children and grandchildren. Blomberg, in his familiar selective

perception of reality, wrote of this: “An ever-recurring worry for her. Her motive honors her. (...) I must fight with her so that she remains with me; my marriage must be struggled for, and I will not lose the struggle, for then I would have lost everything in this earthly existence.” Margarethe von Blomberg returned at the beginning of February to her native city, Berlin. The widow, but especially the story of the “marshal and the whore,” survived Blomberg by several decades. On 16 February 1946 a fellow prisoner noted: “Tell the German doctor Pflücker that von Blomberg must go to a hospital. The American doctor says the same; he fears, however, that Colonel Andrus will not allow it ‘out of general hatred’; the man will soon die under their hands.” Four days later Milch learned that intestinal cancer had been diagnosed in von Blomberg; one month later, on 14 March 1946, the Field Marshal died.

Already two years after Blomberg’s death and his burial in the cemetery of Bad Wiessee, the Blomberg scandal was again carried into the public sphere in April 1948. Margarethe brought a lawsuit in Hamburg against the publishing house Claasen and Goverts and against the German editors of the book published in Switzerland by the former ministerial councillor Dr. Ernst Gisevius, *Bis zum bitteren Ende* [To the Bitter End]. In his questionable book, Gisevius had reported in detail on the alleged past of “the Gruhn” and had described her as a prostitute. The injunction suit took place on 23 April 1948 before the Hamburg Regional Court. Numerous curious spectators and interested persons crowded before the courtroom, in which there was no more room to be had.

The sensation of the trial was that Gisevius’s lawyer, as evidentiary material for the accusations of his client, unexpectedly presented the Gruhn dossier compiled in 1938 — file number 1 Unz I 1137/32 — which he had received from a client who did “not wish to be publicly named.” This person had, according to the lawyer, “found” the file in spring 1945 [sic]. The file had “turned up” in the “ruins of Berlin” in 1945 — at least according to Deutsch.

The trial ended with a settlement. Frau von Blomberg withdrew her suit against Gisevius and signed a declaration of consent that his book could continue to appear in unchanged form. For its part, the publishing house obligated itself to place before all editions a preliminary remark stating that the book contained a number of serious assertions about Frau von Blomberg, but that the intention of the publisher was not to defame anyone. The files incriminating Frau von Blomberg had been available to the author, and he had written down his assertions in good conscience. After the court date, Gisevius explained to press representatives his regret that the settlement, concluded without his involvement, had prevented him from saying what was necessary about the authenticity of the files under exclusion of the public.

At the end of July 1952 *Der Spiegel* reported that Frau von Blomberg intended in the foreseeable future to take over her mother’s massage salon in Berlin and had already passed the examination as a state-approved masseuse for this purpose. Blomberg’s widow withdrew from all further rumors about her person and the marriage with the War Minister, and all attempts by both the Blomberg family and by scholars and journalists to contact her remained unsuccessful. She preserved silence and lived withdrawn in her one-room apartment on Neukölln’s Flughafenstraße. There Margarethe von Blomberg died on 28 March 1978. The net value of her estate amounted to about 100,000 DM. Valuables, as well as letters and documents that could have illuminated the affair of 1938 and details of her relationship with Werner von Blomberg, did not surface, as research at the Berlin-Neukölln probate court and interviews with the notary then responsible show. A biography of Werner von Blomberg did not come about; the time for it had not yet arrived.

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CONCLUSION

Max Frisch writes that in the moment when we have a finished image of someone, we give up that person; we have unavoidably forced him into the corset of a role that perhaps never corresponded to his reality.

So who was Blomberg? It is certainly easier to say who he was not: he was not his legend; not the incarnation of the submissive Hitler adherent; not the “dark spot” on the white tunic of the army; nor was he an “antiwar War Minister,” as he has occasionally been stylized. He was no war hero, for participation in the Second World War was denied to him. That he was therefore also not entangled in war crimes of the Wehrmacht he strangely did not perceive as personal good fortune — too deeply had he internalized the maxims of his estate.

The historical Blomberg moves in a gray zone of history, which made his evaluation difficult for many decades. His life path corresponded in many stations to the “generation-specific normal course” of higher military men of his time. If one compares his life path with that of other officers of his generation, it is in fact striking that little points to a special path. As one of many “men of will,” he was educated in the spirit of obedience and German militarism. His development in the General Staff of the army proceeded steeply, gloriously, and made him one of those highly decorated chosen men within the army, the traditional elite of the Empire and the Weimar Republic. The collective trauma of his epoch was the experience of the First World War, the German defeat, and the Treaty of Versailles. Only against this historical background can the stampings and premises of action of his generation be interpreted.

In accordance with his education he suppressed character dispositions in favor of a disciplined and controlled closedness. He tried not to let his emotions and passions come to the surface. That this is a psychologically dangerous undertaking was reflected in a military policy that consisted of a highly contradictory mixture of rationality and power thinking on one side and irrationality, emotion, and impulse on the other; and that beneath his smooth, impenetrable surface there was hidden a high emotionality showed itself most fatally in his quasi-religious veneration of Hitler.

During the First World War, the man highly interested in philosophy and literature had begun radically to break with traditions and, in the following years, to search for modernity, for a new military doctrine, new images of war, and utopias. Already his affinity for the romantically nationalist ideas of the Freikorps movement after the war proves this break with the traditions of the world into which he had been born. The traditional fiction of the “unpolitical officer” thereby hindered the development of a critically autonomous political consciousness. From then on, against the background of his brilliant career within the 100,000-man army, he was gradually to develop into an opponent of orthodox military men. In this, too, he was of course not alone, for the split in the officer corps caused by the First World War corresponded to a pan-European phenomenon.

Unlike the great majority of his comrades, who adopted an arrogantly dismissive attitude toward the political and social reality of the Weimar period, Blomberg proved to be a receptive learner of contemporary fashions and tendencies. The influences reaching from Hesse and Spengler through

Count Keyserling to intellectually overstrained officer-comrades decisively shaped his image of war and his worldview; and the idea of employing mass armies, drilled by a perfected technique of social-psychological influence and led by a charismatic “ruler of souls,” would never release him.

Blomberg was able to use his high-ranking assignments within the Reichswehr to approach, as far as possible, his ideas of a highly technologized people’s war of the masses. Largely blocking out political reality, he pushed for the introduction of modern weapons and motorized vehicles while intensifying the illegal preparations for border and national defense. Under his aegis fell the plans for the formation of an “A-Army,” which by 1938 was to reach a strength of twenty-one divisions. He drove forward the covert training of flyers and tank specialists. As chief of “Special Group Russia” he intensified cooperation with the Red Army and himself traveled in 1928 to the Soviet Union, from which he returned deeply impressed.

While Blomberg’s military Sovietophilia, which very much stood in Germany’s military tradition and became one of his most important military-political maxims, was one cause of the general’s negative image in the Federal Republic during the Cold War, by 1928 at latest — when Blomberg, as Chief of the Truppenamt, was responsible for planning the operational war games — it becomes clear that he no longer perceived military-political reality, or perceived it only very selectively. This seemed to bring his career to an abrupt end when in 1929 he was, as it were, “punitively transferred” to East Prussia. The limits of Weimar military policy and the death of his wife let him fall into a deep depression. As has been shown, it was chance that at this moment made the general Hitler’s Defense and War Minister.

When the Third Reich began its historical existence on 30 January 1933, for many Germans there began the time of the rule of the “savior,” whom Blomberg too had anticipated for years. The initial skepticism toward the “Bohemian corporal” soon transformed itself into that difficult-to-explain and much-described admiration for the bearer of charisma, Hitler, to whom Blomberg too, in his need for redemption, would successively succumb, and thereby finally make himself the ally of his own gravediggers.

The analysis of the General Field Marshal’s military policy between 1933 and 1938 showed how successful that “act of social magic” (Bourdieu) was, in which symbols, insignia, rituals, and emotions are placed into the tradition of an ideology or are first created in its sense — that act, or rather tightrope act, which Blomberg performed in Hitler’s sense within the military circle.

Spotlights of a career that ended with the greatest state crisis of the Third Reich, Blomberg’s condemnation, and the final disempowerment of the armed forces. Despite the causes, circumstances, and consequences of his fall, Werner von Blomberg must be granted an important place in the military history of the twentieth century. With his wide-ranging powers to decide economic, personnel, political, and rearmament questions, he contributed to a high degree to creating the foundations for the organization and training with which the German Wehrmacht, technically superior to the other European powers, went to war in September 1939.

The question of what influence the army and its leadership had taken, or could have taken, on the development of the National Socialist regime has repeatedly been posed and discussed. It was a matter of the question whether the army could have assumed the dominant role — and whether this would have entailed a different historical development; it was a matter of the question which persons at the head of the armed power, thus also Blomberg, behaved how on the basis of which individual and collective stampings, where they failed, and not least, implicitly, also of the question at which points alternatives for action would have been conceivable.

It remains open how the history of the Third Reich would have developed had Werner von Blomberg remained the leading balancing link among the three parts of the Wehrmacht and Hitler's close military adviser. Would the following years have taken a different shape under the premise of his influence on the dictator's plans? At this point the question arises whether the will to act upon history himself was laid down in his personality. Nothing points to it: "history happens," it says again and again in his memoirs.

Blomberg therefore has something of a "general without qualities" — this not in the sense of "without attributes," and not only in allusion to the Reichswehr generality's fiction of the "unpolitical soldier," but rather in the sense of Robert Musil's *Man Without Qualities*, Ulrich, in the sense of a modern ambivalence and passivity — vague, not definable, contradictory — and thereby frighteningly typical of his time; frightening even when one does not stop asking how it could happen that German society made Hitler possible.

Granted that this too is only interpretation — and you will be eager enough to object — well, so much the better.

Friedrich Nietzsche